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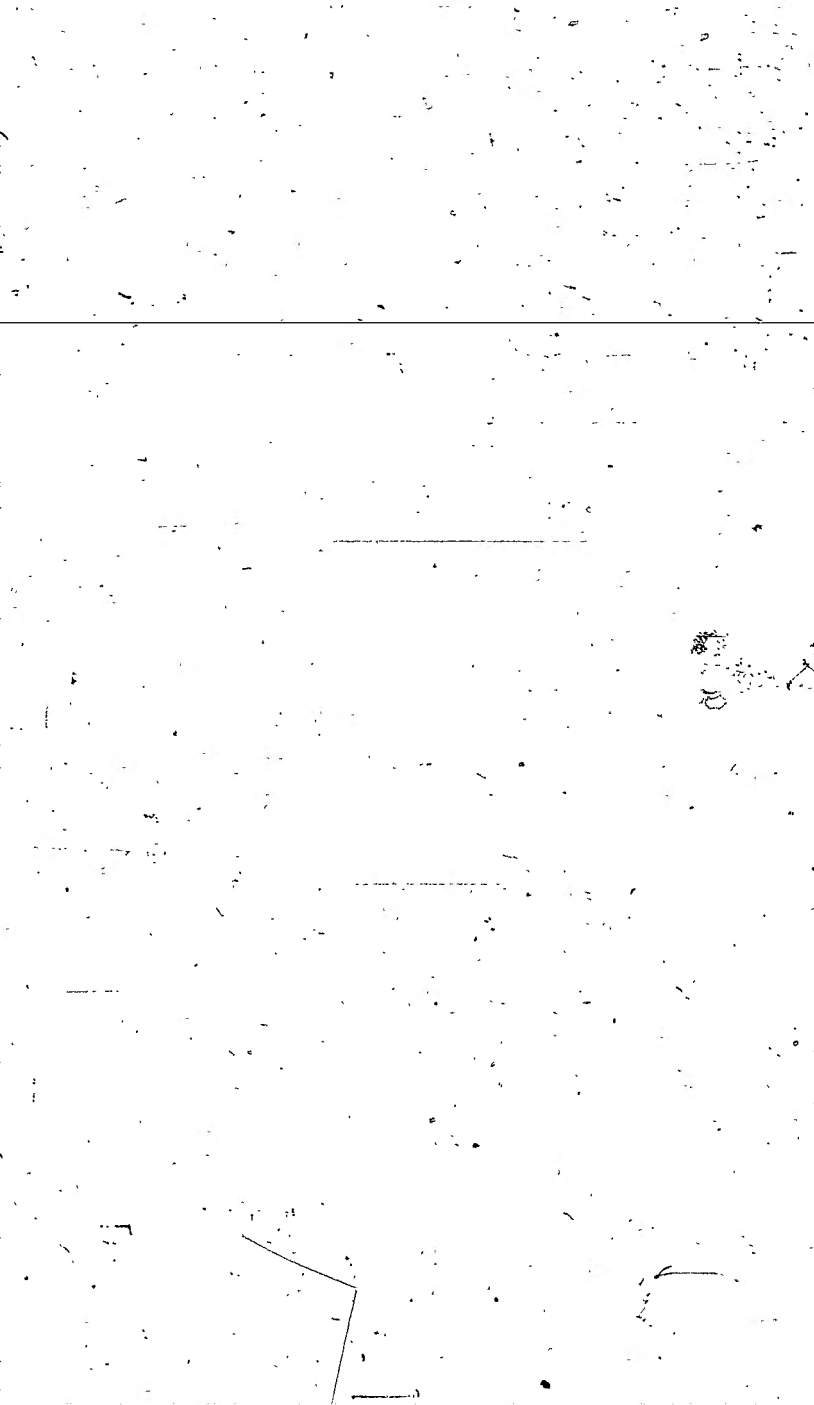


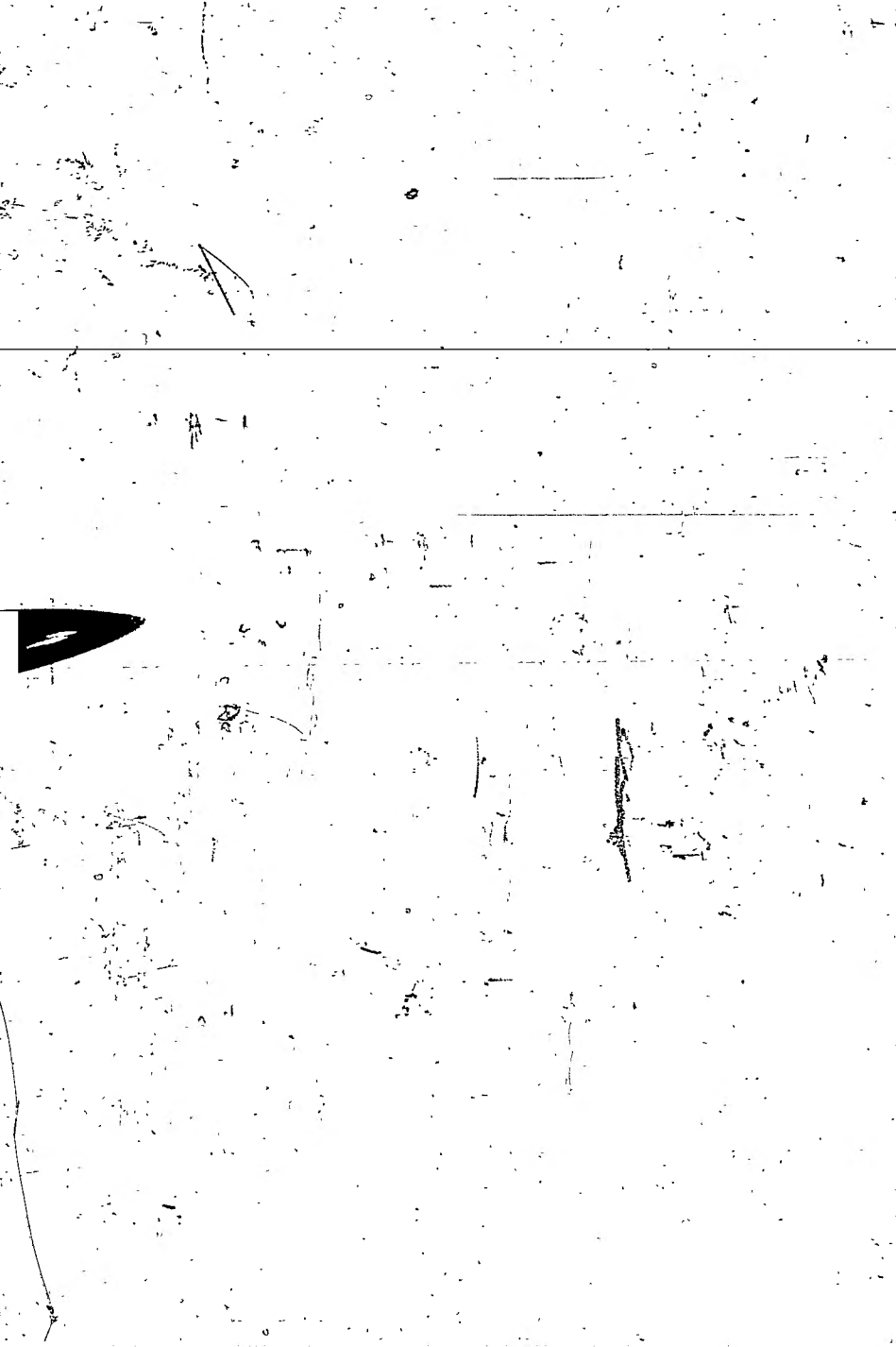
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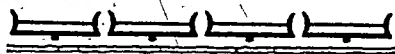
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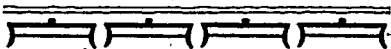
SAMUEL ALEXANDER WHITE

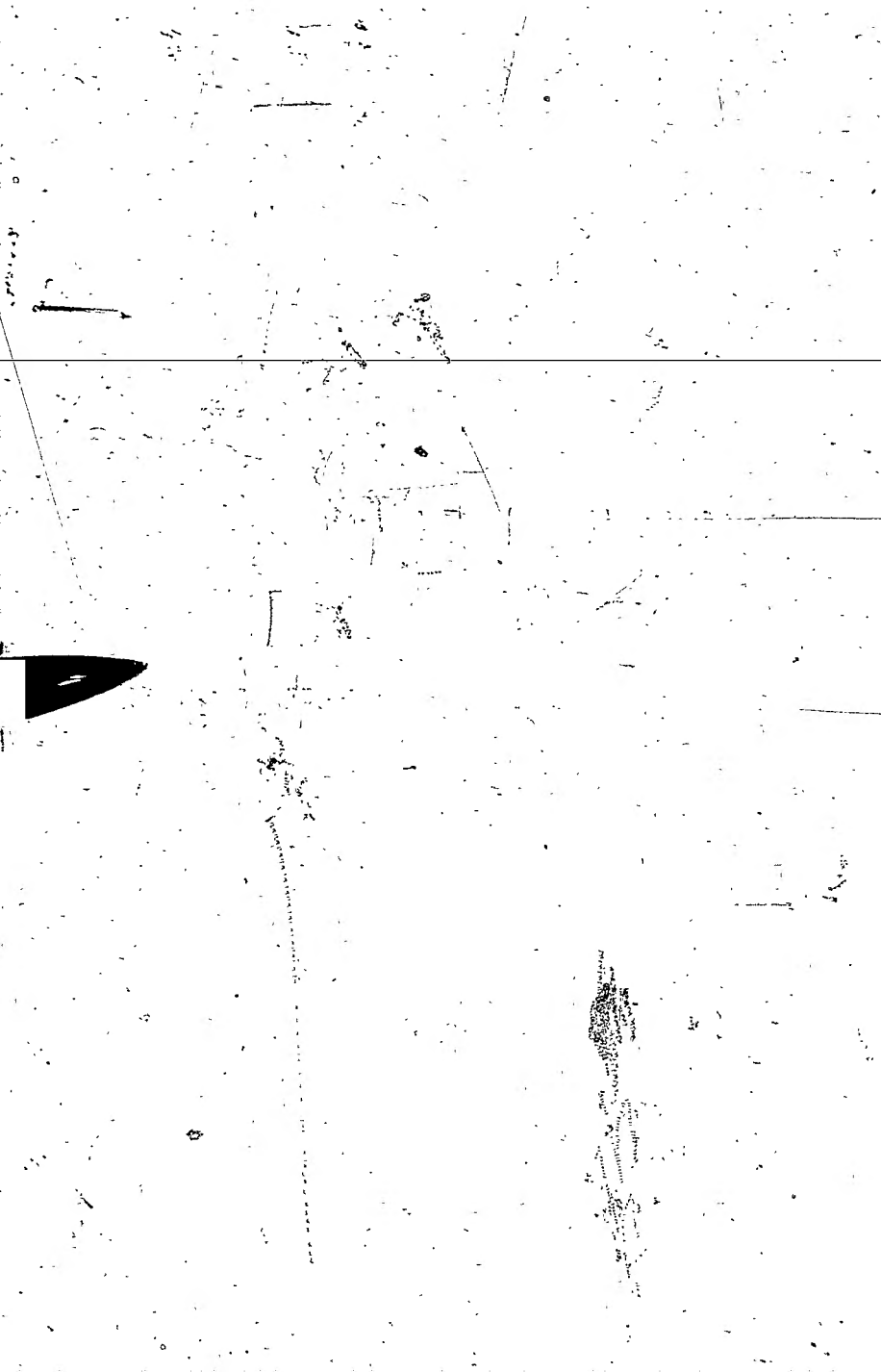
Author of

"Northwest Law," "Northwest Wagons"
and *"North of the Border"*

Young Keith Culver was famous from the Arkansas to the Canadian border for his hunting craft and his scouting ability. He was noted as a bison hunter, and had once killed a whole ambush of savages who had surrounded Buffalo Bill. His prowess stood him in good stead as he and his equally daring companions set out to quell the Second Northwest Rebellion. On the way they had to contend with unfriendly Sioux and Crees, but that was nothing compared to what they faced at their destination in the Qu'Appelle Valley.

The "Jack London of Canada" weaves another colorful tale, enlivened by the figures of Louis Riel and other picturesque characters who helped make Northwest history.







Called Northwest

by
SAMUEL ALEXANDER WHITE

Author of
"NORTHWEST LAW," "NORTHWEST WAGONS"
and "NORTH OF THE BORDER"



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CHAPTER I

Kansas Cuss, Keith Culver, Fights Sioux by Marsh of Whooping Cranes.

"KEITH, a Northwest wire from Bob Armstrong at Prince Albert, Saskatchewan," called Ilo Ross. "Signs himself chief scout to Superintendent Crozier, Mounted Police, and Major-General Middleton, commander of the Northwest Field Force, Canadian Militia, there."

Tearing off the adjoining Ross and Culver homesteads, which abutted the old Armstrong ranch that Bob had left to revel in adventure and the dangerous life of a plains guide, riding like a golden cyclone on her sorrel mustang Dust Storm along the bend of the Arkansas River, the Kansas girl shouted in an effort to find her cousin Keith Culver. Her hair, wind-rippled, looked like molten sunlight; her blue eyes outflashed the Kansas spring sky; her full, curved cheeks and dainty chin were as bright as the bronze face of a mountain goddess streaking prairieward from the Rockies in the distance.

Her slim arms, agile as darting javelins, alternately, waved and reined, fluttering the open collared, gray, pearl-buttoned waist that she wore with her chamois-colored riding costume and striking the tan boots and copper hued chaps encasing her mobile thighs with whipping jacket tails.

"Keith, where are you hiding?" Ilo demanded. "Major Crozier's head guide, do you hear? Bob Armstrong's wire. Can you beat that? Chief scout to the

Northwest Mounted!"

Just two miles out of Kansas City, from the bend of the Arkansas, Keith signalled back, in a cautioning code, to stop Ilo's clamor. He lay invisible in the grass, writing a letter of invitation to his hunting friend Bartley Chester, "Bucking Bart," far up in Toronto, Canada, asking Bart to join him in a Northwest expedition after buffalo. At the same time he was watching a Teton Sioux Indian stalking a trumpeter swan at the ready margin of the Marsh of the Whooping Cranes.

The Marsh of the Whooping Cranes was the resting place and feeding ground of myriads of geese, ducks, cranes, swans and lesser water birds winging the long migration route from the Gulf and the Texas Brazos in the south to the Red River of the North on the Manitoban plains and the farther Saskatchewan River beyond.

Keith knew that the six foot Teton Sioux was not really intent on the swan but contriving to ambush him instead, as the tall, swarthy warrior's body bellied through the little grassy islands and rushy tussocks. From the constantly changing angle of the Indian's edging about, Keith understood that the Sioux, imagining himself unseen, was maneuvering close enough for a deadly shot.

No doubt the stalker took him for a member of the half-breed hunting party, the Winnipeg metis, the Red River Freeman, who had carted down according to their custom each spring to benefit by this miracle of pinions and to prey on the buffalo grazing on

fresh green pastures where these Free People had burned off the dry, dead prairie grass the autumn before.

Over on the other side of the Marsh of the Whooping Cranes, Keith counted two hundred and fifty of the Red River voyageurs' wooden carts passing in a gay parade. He could see the glint of men's blue brass-buttoned coats and women's fancy head shawls, silk skirts and beaded, embroidered moccasins.

Interrupting grim concentration on the pageant of the plains, Keith realized also that had the Teton Sioux known his real identity, he, the Sioux, probably would have waited to secure some help before attacking. For young Culver was famous from the Arkansas to the Canadian border for his hunting craft and his scouting ability. At this same curve of the Arkansas River he had killed his first Indian. He had fought with Colonel Cody, beating off an ambush of savages who had "Buffalo Bill" surrounded. Farther north he had equalled the record of his friend and neighbor Bob Armstrong, who had hung up a figure of one hundred and twenty-six bison killed in half a day.

But the tall Sioux brave did not know, and so he came on alone.

Ilo Ross, too, came on, galloping.

She quit yelling as she caught Keith's warning signal, and noticed the prairie grass waving over the spot where he was hiding.

Farther on, by the marsh edge, she saw the sword grass waving also, but took it for the movements of

the swans and cranes swinging their soldier ranks as they fed.

Then Keith's new Henry rifle cracked as he dropped pencil and pressed trigger, and everything seemed to happen at once before Ilo's surprised eyes.

The Teton Sioux straightened up suddenly in the reeds, rigidly erect on his toe tips, shocked bodily into a vertical posture by Keith's bullet, while his own gun went off a foot above his white antagonist's head.

The Sioux's spotted pony gave a startled jump from somewhere behind a stunted hillock and raced away past its master, pitching face down in the marshy shallows, splashing the water onto Keith's knees as he, too, leaped erect to make sure his enemy did not stir again.

Keith's own bay horse River Gleam, hiding, like its master, in a patch of wild grain, snorted inquiringly and revealed himself instantly at his master's call, darting alongside Ilo's Dust Storm where she pulled him up short at the rifles' report.

To one side of the stunted hillock more mounted Sioux broke the horizon—a dozen of them, the rest of the scouting party to which Keith's attacker belonged—while on the other side the caravan of the Red River Free People, anticipating a skirmish, whirled their string of carts round in a ring facing them and threw out their blue-coated scouts.

The metis fired as they came, but the Sioux, very badly outnumbered, replied with only a few desultory shots and, whipping their swift ponies out of

range, vanished in the hill pockets behind the marsh, leaving Keith and Ilo staring down at the dead member of their band.

Ilo was astonished, shaken, alarmed, but she did not become hysterical. It was not the first time she had seen a savage fall. More than once she had helped her father Ted Ross fight off red skulkers round the Ross Ranch, and her own mother had died in a doomed prairie schooner train heading Kansasward across the West.

She gazed steadily a moment, at the motionless Teton Sioux, and at the innumerable gauzy wings waving over him. The whole marsh expanse was now like a feathery shroud. The first two shots had flushed the wild fowl flocks, and the subsequent firing had started the resting, feeding horde on their northward way. Spring was early on the Arkansas this year of 1885. It had begun a full two months earlier, and although it was only the first of March, the sky was one vast flyway full of migrants bound to their nesting grounds in Canada. In the weaving maze of pinions Ilo glimpsed the ivory sheen of the swans, the golden buff of the younger cranes, then the spotless, snowy coats of their elders, the snow geese, blue geese, black-fronts, grays, and the lordly Canadas leading them all.

A symbol it was to the girl, the call of the Northwest, and while she looked, the symbol was augmented, enhanced by earth lure as well as sky attraction, by ground transport as well as aerial evolution, for with the disappearance of the Sioux riders she

saw the Red River cart caravan break circle and swerve into line toward them, heading home for the Winnipeg also.

"Like the birds, they're homing, Keith," she commented, with something of longing in her tone, yet smiling brightly to add a certain lightness to her words, which studiously had avoided any reference to the prone Indian in the marsh shallows and so were designed to ease the strain of the dangerous moment for her cousin.

Keith felt glad that he was not forced to explain, for it was never very pleasant for him to have to kill a savage so dead as that. His warm brown eyes thanked her with an umber flash. His handsome, youthful face, velvet soft of skin and highly colored as a woman's, lightened with a sunny, relieved smile as he brushed the swamp waters from his buckskin-legged knees and ran his shapely, tanned fingers through the dark hair of his bared head, all waved in nature's crimp clear down to the nape of his slender neck.

Smiling and nodding, he picked up his dropped pencil, stuck it between his fine white teeth and tucked the sheet of his letter into the pocket of his amethyst flannel shirt.

"Yes, they're off borderward," he agreed. "A smart outfit, well captained. Wonder who the captain is?"

CHAPTER 2

Captain Paul Hull, of Red River Freeman, Identifies Flame Eye

KEITH waved his hand in greeting at the good-looking, agile young voyageur who rode at the head of the Red River Freeman on a brown buffalo runner.

The pony was swift and sinewy in all its lines, patently Indian bred and trained to the art of chasing the buffalo since the day of its separation from the coltish bands to join the three-year-olds.

When it came abreast, Keith called genially to the French-Canadian rider.

"Captain of the hunt, eh?" he saluted him, running an admiring eye over the long string of carts carrying the women and the children, over the splendid mounts of the half-breed hunters.

"Yes, *Monsieur*," replied the captain.

His black eyes switched to the dead Sioux while he spoke in a voice wonderfully rich and musical.

He stared intently, studying the still upturned face of the Indian, and an expression of comprehension crossed his own smooth, swarthy, well-chiseled features.

His admiring glance traveled on, deepening as it rested on Ilo. He bowed politely to her, his face roguishly creased by a smile that parted gleaming teeth.

"Yes, *Mademoiselle*," he went on, including her with easy camaraderie in his introduction of himself, "Paul Hull by name. Lieutenant to Gabriel Dumont

himself. Even if you have never heard of Paul, no doubt you have heard of Gabriel up yonder in his Red River country."

"Oh!" exclaimed Keith. "Gabriel Dumont—yes, indeed, I have. One of Louis Riel's right hand men, according to all this talk that drifts down the Arkansas about a second Northwest rebellion."

Paul Hull shifted his shoulders in a noncommittal gesture that somehow expressed surprise.

"One hears rumors everywhere," he observed guardedly. "And you, *Monsieur*, are—?"

"Keith Culver, a cuss from Kansas," grinned the girl's cousin. "This is Ilo Ross, daughter of my uncle, Ted Ross—next homestead there, beyond the Armstrong holding."

"Armstrong?" echoed young Paul Hull. "Louis Riel; Gabriel Dumont and I met an Armstrong in Montana. We met him while hunting buffalo in the Judith Basin. That was three years ago, I think. His name was Bob."

"That was the other Kansas cuss," Keith laughed. "He went up into the Judith Basin in 1882."

"We met him again last fall," recalled Hull, "at Prince Albert, during some of the metis meetings there."

"Don't marvel at that," declared Keith. "You're liable to run into Bob any time, anywhere. Roamer, adventurer—that spells him out."

Paul Hull nodded, still guardedly.

"I know," he asserted with slow thoughtfulness. "Bob Armstrong is famous as a scout among us in

Canada as well as in the United States. And speaking of meetings, since these Armstrong, Ross and Culver homesteads extend a good many miles across the prairie, perhaps by chance—perhaps by some strange chance—we might see each other again, we three, before our carts reach the Canada line. In any event we will soon camp for the night, off there, somewhere within your lands.”

“We might,” hazarded Keith, much as a guess.

He looked inquiringly at Ilo, who was still the unruffled object of the captain’s warm gaze.

“Perhaps,” ventured Ilo. “Who knows? One never can tell what will happen here. Look at those Sioux. Make a strong camp, Paul Hull.”

“I shall surely do that,” promised Paul.

Ilo’s remark seemed to recall the dead Indian in the marsh to him.

He leaned from his brown pony for a closer inspection of the body.

“You were swifter than we, *Monsieur* Keith,” he lauded him. “Do you know him?”

Culver shook his head wonderingly.

“No, I certainly do not know him, Hull. Never saw him before that I know of. Do you know him?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Who is he?”

“He is Flame Eye, a relative of White Cap, a Sioux chief among the tribes back beyond our boundary,” Paul Hull identified the savage. “Flame Eye is a chief in his own right, too. You have heard of White Cap, of course?”

"Yes, I've heard of White Cap," admitted Keith.

"White Cap is a trouble maker," brooded Paul. "Sometimes for the whites, sometimes for my Free People, sometimes for other people."

"You think White Cap will try to make trouble for me over this?"

"Surely, if he gets the chance," Paul told him. "White Cap will not let it go unavenged. So I feel that I should warn you."

Keith tossed his head with youthful indifference.

"Thanks, Paul," he acknowledged. "If he makes trouble it will be because I do not get him first."

"That may well be," smiled Paul. "However, I leave the caution with you till I see you again. I hope that it will be soon. I hope—"

Captain Paul left his hopes unfinished as he rode on with his voyageurs, but he bowed again to Ilo, smiling and waving his cap in the distance so that the smile and the gesture completed the expression of hope for the beautiful girl from Kansas, with the Kansas drawl in her voice.

Ilo and Keith watched them go for a few moments, listening to the greaseless tune of the wooden wheels carrying a mile and more down wind.

"Paul Hull seems friendly and polite and altogether a gentleman," Ilo appraised him, "but I noticed when he spoke of Bob Armstrong that you didn't mention you'd just got a Northwest wire from Bob."

"I figured I'd better not mention it," Keith pointed out gravely, his own voice Arkansas-twangled, reso-

nant as a cello.

"Why?"

"Because I heard you sing out that Bob had joined up as a Mounted Police scout, and if this second Northwest rebellion breaks, Bob and Paul Hull might be on opposite sides, you savvy?"

"Yes, I understand that," nodded Ilo.

"Bob's communicative, isn't he?" reflected Keith humorously. "Only been gone a whole lot of years and now he sends a telegram. You've read it, Ilo. Tell me what he says."

Ilo tapped the letter sheet protruding from Keith's shirt pocket.

"Tell me, first, to whom you were writing when you used correspondence as a decoy, lying in the marsh grass like that," she commanded. "Not to Bob, surely, as a sort of odd coincidence, eh?"

"No, to Bucking Bart Chester," laughed Keith. "Present address: Toronto, Canada, care of John Ross Robertson, *Evening Telegram*. J. R. R. knows Bart and rebellions. J. R. R. reported the first in 1869 for his *Daily Telegraph* and for Joseph Medill's *Chicago Tribune*. J. R. R. went West by Chicago. I met him in the *Tribune* office getting his credentials from Editor Joe."

"Why do you always call that fellow 'Bucking Bart'?" asked Ilo curiously.

"Because you always see him riding something that's bucking or going to buck," chuckled Keith. "You should get a glimpse of his horsemanship sometime, Ilo."

"I'd like to," declared the girl. "But I thought your friend Bartley Chester was still in the Northwest. Last time you spoke of him, Keith, you said he was in Regina, Saskatchewan, didn't you?"

"Guess I did, Ilo. Last letter I had from him he was in Regina, bringing in some horses for the Mounted Police, from his Double C Ranch I told you about near the Western capital, and gentling them. But he was coming on to Toronto with another shipment for the Governor General's Bodyguards. The Bodyguards bought the best cavalry mounts Bart could provide, and all Western proofed. Good horse insurance—and life insurance—if that famous regiment should be ordered into another Northwest rebellion, as Bart expected. Said to write him there at his point of delivery."

Ilo smiled comprehendingly.

"So you did, I gather, Keith," she deduced, "but just what did you say to this close pal of yours I've never seen yet, this Bucking Bart Chester?"

"Better read me Bob Armstrong's telegram first," suggested Keith, getting anxious.

"No, read me your letter first," teased Ilo, still procrastinating, feminine fashion, with the momentous news her Dust Storm had brought thundering out to the Marsh of Whooping Cranes.

CHAPTER 3

Kansas Girl, Ilo Ross, Answers Chief N.W.M.P. Scout Bob Armstrong's Wire

FROWNING with some impatience, Keith jerked the letter from his shirt pocket and glanced it over again, as if to make sure what he had written before the moment of risky diversion that the Sioux, Flame Eye, had caused.

"Well," he summarized swiftly, "I told Bart I was sick of Kansas, sick of the aftermath of Civil War time, sick of both former Yankees and former Confederates with high appointments—now that the Civil War's all over—in the Regular U. S. Army, coming onto the Armstrong homestead and the Ross homestead and the Culver homestead and commandeering our horses and cattle and giving us bills of payment on the commissariat that will never be paid in my lifetime. Civil War's over, yes, but the Indian Wars against the Sioux and the rest of the Western tribes go on, I told 'Bucking B.' Chester, and why in Hades can't the American Government feed its own troops in Kansas and Wyoming and Dakota and Montana?"

"That's what Dad's been saying all along," asserted Ilo. "That's what Bob Armstrong said when he left under pressure of Civil War raiding parties. Dad's been swearing he'd leave, too, right soon, and take me away with him. Dad was arguing with a couple of regular Army officers on your land, Keith, when I rode out—a Major Ralph Wade and a Colonel

Hubert Butt. Both blew in at once from different columns chasing Injuns and showed U. S. Army supply orders so they could start robbing us. The Major and the Colonel were trying to round up the stock, although Dad was pretty mad and looking for his gun."

"What—again?" barked Keith. "Wade, that's the Northernner who's been bothering us. Butt, he's been round here before, the fussy Southerner. Why didn't you tell me so, first? We'd better get back, Ilo, before they clean us out."

"Right smart, Keith," agreed Ilo. "But Bart's letter—?"

"Told Bart I was plumb disgusted with it all and if he'd strike Northwest as soon as he has fixed up the Bodyguards with the horses, I'd meet him at Qu'Appelle or points beyond. Told him Ilo Ross and her dad were discontented, too, and were lighting out with me. That ought to fetch Bart, mentioning you, Ilo. Reminded him you were beautiful as a Kansas spring, that you were the real thing and worth a trip back Northwest or anywhere else to see."

"Oh! Keith," she protested, "that's laying it on thick, isn't it?"

"And that's most all," Keith finished, "except for a postscript about shooting the Sioux. Still, I don't know whether I should have put you in, Ilo. Even if it turned out that your dad and I did vamoose, I'm finicky concerning you venturing with us."

"Why?" demanded Ilo.

"It's a lone country up there," Keith scowled. "It runs like this."

On the back of the letter sheet, he sketched roughly the mighty Saskatchewan River flowing down from the Rocky Mountains with its two great branches traversing the Northwest plains.

"North branch and South branch parallel each other for over one hundred miles," Keith indicated.

"Angle between's the Northwest trouble ground, claimed by the metis and their Injun chums. Lot of land scarce of civilized places, you can see. That's the Forks. Prince Albert is thirty miles west of there, on the North branch, with Fort Carlton another fifty miles up. Batoche, the Rebellion's heart, you might call it, is on the South branch, opposite Fort Carlton. Duck Lake is the little settlement between. Nearest telegraph office to Prince Albert is at Humboldt. That's where Bob Armstrong wired from?"

Ilo looked at the slip she carried.

"Yes, Humboldt," she confirmed.

"Aren't you ever going to read it to me?" fretted Keith. "Tell me what Bob says."

Ilo disclosed the contents of the wire:

"NORTHWEST REBELLION SURE-
MOUNTED POLICE TAKING ON A-1
SCOUTS TO CONNECT WITH MAJOR
GENERAL MIDDLETON'S MILITIA—"

"That's because they'll need men to carry despatches," Keith broke in. "Messengers where there is no telegraph line near at hand."

Ilo went on reading, to finish the telegraphic message:

"CAN YOU AND TED ROSS COME NORTH AND SIGN ON—BART CHESTER SUGGESTED YOU WOULD—"

"Authority of:—Superintendent

Northwest Mounted Police

Prince Albert

(Major Crozier)

"Signed:—Robert Armstrong, Chief Scout,

N. W. M. P."

"All right, we'll go," Keith accepted without hesitation. "I know when we get through with the Northern Major Wade and the Southern Colonel Butt it'll be time to go. Send a wire, Ilo, a yes answer, will you? We'll ride round by Kansas City. Won't take many minutes, and I'll add another postscript to Bart, letting him know we're on our way. I can post my letter while you shoot the news to Constable Armstrong that we're leaving for Canada." Keith scribbled hastily and then mounted River Gleam, while Ilo, already in the saddle, inserted the answer to Bob's question in the reply blank that had come with the telegram and quoted it experimentally:

"TED ROSS—ILO ROSS—KEITH CULVER
—ALL RIDING NORTHWEST TONIGHT
—WROTE BART CHESTER, WE ARE
PULLING OUT—"

"Signed:—Keith."

"O. K.," nodded Keith. "I explained to Bart in the additional postscript that Bob had broken his long silence with the stirring words '*Maintiens Le Droit*' (Maintain The Right) and that we three had taken up the motto and the crest of gold."

"That's great, Keith," smiled Ilo, "and it'll make you feel better about me going along to the Saskatchewan country, won't it, my solicitous cousin?"

"Sure will that," Keith told her, as they swung Dust Storm and River Gleam and pelted across between the river bend and the spreading marsh toward the Kansas City limits. "I will bet my bottom dollar you'll like Bart, too, when you meet up with him. Forgot to inform you that there's blue blood in Bart, although he sits a bronco so well. His father is a relation of the English aristocrat Lord Sanford. Chester Senior got tired of London and Sussex downs and drifted Northwest with Bart, and Bart used to keep me laughing till my heart near stopped when he told me how Bob Armstrong guided Lord Sanford's party in, first time Bart met Bob, and vice versa. You ask Bart or Bob about it, Ilo."

"You bet I will," Ilo declared. "Bob was always seeing the funny side of things. Was this English caravan a humorous outfit?"

"Humorous? I should say so," laughed Keith. "Comic. You ask them. So Chester Senior liked the wild and woolly West and stayed there and started ranching on the Double C when Lord Sanford and the rest of his friends went back to the Strand and to Portsmouth. They were mostly Naval officers, you

see."

Ilo began to laugh also, conjuring up a mental picture of a Naval outfit in the depths of the Northwest, and of the effect on Bob Armstrong when he contracted to guide them through Indian-infested, badman country where wagons were ambushed and white scalps lifted while the scout in charge turned his back.

"So that's how Bart put on his man-size and feels at home on the range," Keith explained. "You couldn't get him or Chester Senior ever to go back. Besides, he's working for the Mounted."

"And so is Bob, you, Dad and—and myself, I guess," observed Ilo gaily. "At least we will be soon—soon's we get this wire of acceptance off."

"Off she goes, then," whooped Keith, giving River Gleam his head. "Here's the track. Yonder's the station. Mail box still there, isn't it? Saves a trip across to the post office, and we're pushed for time. I can post Bart's love missive there, telling him all about the Kansas girl who's meant for him—"

"Keith," interrupted the girl, "you're a few pony jumps ahead of yourself, aren't you? We're not at Prince Albert yet. We've a long, long trail ahead."

Keith pulled up by the platform for a second and flung himself off his horse.

"Yes, U. S. mail box still doing business, in spite of the Sioux who like to melt the tin down into their bullet moulds to flavor the lead," he cried facetiously.

"Accordingly I post."

Ilo was practical and wise as well as romantic and

youthful.

"Maybe you will post," she reminded him, "if you've got a stamp on you."

Young Culver fished in the pocket of his shirt of amethyst flannel, colored like the river iris, the valley violets and the wild clematis on the hills where he hid so often with his bay pony.

"Luckily enough, here're some," he announced. "Silver for sending on the wire, too. Count the words, Ilo. Right change, by thunder! Everything pans out today, doesn't it? Canadian monetary and these two-cent brown 1883 U. S. stamps printed year before last. So slip off and shove it through the window by the operator's key, there."

Ilo leaned from Dust Storm without dismounting, darting her slim arm through the aperture.

"Canada, Larry," she directed. "Flash it now."

Larry Walters, middle-aged, brown, wizened, sat coatless at the desk, his sleeves rolled up, a long pipe in his mouth and a railroad cap on his partially bald head. He looked up apologetically from his key, and took the pipe from his lips so that the many gold fillings in his teeth glinted in a smile which matched the welcome of his merry topaz eyes.

"Sorry I had the door locked, Miss Ilo," he apologized, "but those danged Sioux keep riding the tracks and burning up the cattle guards to boil in their camp kettles."

"I know, Larry," Ilo sympathized. "Keith just got one a while ago, and we'll be getting more on the Northwest trail, most likely. I'll say goodbye for

Dad."

Larry Walters took off his railroad cap with precise gentlemanliness and laid it down while he put the message to Canada on his key.

"Kansas City will be sorry to lose you, Miss Ilo," he observed while he dot-dash-dotted. "The same to your dad from me. And the same to Keith— Hey, Keith! Don't destroy Uncle Sam's mail box. You're bad as the Injuns, you are."

Keith had dropped in his stamped letter, pasted with the special printing of American brown two-cent 1883 stamps, and was sitting his horse a moment by the box, hammering it violently with his powerful fist.

"Start of a wonderful romance," he exulted, "and one whole of an adventure. Better come along, Larry. We're off pretty pronto. What you saying?"

"And lose my pension, not to mention my useless life?" grinned Larry out of the window. "No, sirree, Keith. I know which side my bread is buttered on."

"So long, then," Keith called.

He waved his hat as Ilo joined him.

"Make it a short visit," Larry shouted after them as the ponies reared away.

He watched them vanish in dust, kicking up the ballast along the track and past the water tank that overlooked the Culver limits.

CHAPTER 4

Ted Ross Backs Up Northern Major Wade and Southern Colonel Butt

THE Canada letter posted and the Canada telegram despatched, Keith and Ilo made better speed, cutting across country from the water tank, rounding several small sloughs that drained into the big marsh and coming out on the long valley stretch which had been taken over in partnership by the Ross, Culver and Armstrong interests, and was named the R C A Range.

The sun was sinking at the distant western end, in the gap between the Raton Mountains and the Spanish Peaks, and at the near eastern end its crimson rays blazing for miles across the level bottoms caught up in sharp silhouette a group of figures in front of Keith's house.

"There's Dad," Ilo cried out. "He's got his gun, too, and he's backing Major Wade and Colonel Butt off."

"Yes, but it looks as if he didn't find it soon enough," growled Keith. "See that?"

He pointed toward a bunch of troopers down by the horse corral leading off his four-year olds, and toward a second bunch over at the cattle corral rounding up his yearlings.

"My stars, the costumed rustlers," denounced Ilo impetuously, "they've got 'most all of them."

"And yours as well," Keith reminded her, sweeping his arm in a gesture that embraced her own cor-

rals over on the slope between the Arkansas River and the Missouri River where the Ross ranch house stood.

Ilo's sudden excitement changed to alarm at the bite in her cousin's voice. She darted a side glance at him, noting the grim, determined expression that had driven the habitual debonair look from his face and chased away his constant youthful smile.

"Steady, Keith," she cautioned. "Don't you go off half cocked like Dad does or there'll be murder in the U. S. Army."

"Condemn Wade and Butt, they deserve to be stretched plumb cold," Keith complained.

"But remember you sent Constable Bob Armstrong that telegram. You said you were going to Canada tonight. You want to be able to go. Watch out for that, cousin boy, and don't get my dad hurt either. Recollect we Rosses, father and daughter, want to be able to ride along, too."

Keith nodded stubbornly, as if that were sound sense but didn't go down very well in the face of all this provocation and the remembrance of previous raids that had brought each of the Kansas partners financial losses, not to mention disorganization of their grazing plans in the Arkansas Valley for the R C A Range.

"All right, Ilo," he gave in a bit, "I'll try to recall that, but you can see that your dad isn't any docile schoolboy and hard to hold. His finger's fair itching on that trigger."

Ted Ross was sitting his yellow horse sidewise,

looking down his Spencer repeating rifle at Major Wade and Colonel Butt, the sunset striking his sandy hair and straw-colored mustache, firing his big gray eyes and reddening further the bright patches that always burned on his high cheekbones. His broad, angry chin stuck out, and he bared his rugged white teeth in a challenge that invested also every other part of his body—the bony, bronzed fingers, muscular arms, heavy shoulders and hips in tan corduroy with the trousers tucked into high-heeled riding boots.

“Confound you, Wade,” he berated the soldier in a voice that carried like a mellow horn yet had a certain rasp of petulance in it, “and you, Butt, call your troopers back with that outfit.”

The Northern Major was a short, rotund officer with gray-streaked hair, a saber scar across one hollow, swarthy cheek, a prominent brown mole on the other, green eyes sharp as stars, a thin nose and a clipped voice incisive with commands. The Colonel from the South contrasted markedly with him in his thinness, lanky height and gentlemanly poise in the saddle. His benign, pop-eyed, baby-cheeked face was shoved forward inquiringly in mild surprise, and his Vandyke and sweeping mustaches waved in polite protest that was reflected in the strained look in his almost yellow eyes under their thickets of cinnamon eyebrows. Both rode handsome big cavalry horses, dappled gray and light chestnut respectively.

“Now, Ross, I’m telling you for the last time that your account will be paid,” Major Wade answered him. “Here’s General Terry’s order, good as Cali-

fornia gold."

"And here is mine, sir," Colonel Butt put in, "from my own commander, General Miles."

"I'm not taking any Army orders," snapped Ilo's father, his hand tightening ominously on the trigger guard. "Chase your Government's wranglers back here with Keith Culver's and my stock. We market where we blame well please."

He was on the point of firing when Keith's horse, riding into his line of sight, made him push his rifle barrel aside and Ilo, rearing up on his quarter, caught him by the arm.

"Don't shoot, Dad," Ilo implored sharply. "Let Keith do the ejecting."

"I was just going to show them," her father excused himself, stubbornly trying to raise his blocked arm, "going to perforate their pistol holsters and snip their saber scabbards off—"

"Never mind that, Dad. It's Keith's land underfoot. Keith has the first say."

Keith swung his pony, facing Major Wade and Colonel Butt but at the same time keeping River Gleam sidling cleverly like a skilled roper working for lots of room. He did not pull his own gun from the saddle sheath, but reached instead for the lariat coiled on the horn.

"Yes, Ted, I'll talk to the military," he proposed, with a confiding nod to his older partner.

He handled the rope while he spoke, his actions apparently routine, mechanical, calculated to dispel any suspicion of impending violence on his part.

"I served notice on you, last visit, not to come commandeering round here again, Wade," he abruptly reminded the Major. "Think we're running experimental farms or something to present the Government with the best Arkansas breeds of horses and the finest Kansas cattle? Ought to be the other way round."

The Major waved his hand here and there, indicating various landmarks over the spacious countryside.

"Look, Culver, you know how far we march," he pointed out. "Our columns are protecting you people's homesteads from the raiding Indians."

"And you figure to go on making us pay toll for your meandering about?" demanded Keith.

"We have to lay in supplies when we run out and can't freight any from a handy fort. For what we happen to need en route, we're certainly going to call on you, because our troopers must be fed—and mounted fresh."

"I'm tired of cavalry cutting out my herds," Keith growled. "That's a job for cowhands only, and only when I give the word. I don't stomach living on credit for months, waiting for money that must be coming West in a covered wagon. Besides, how do I know you and Butt aren't in the Texas steer business as a sideline and selling our stuff at a profit?"

Major Wade's green eyes blazed and his puffing cheeks quivered until the saber scar grew a violent purple.

"You call me a thief, Culver?" he demanded.

angrily.

Colonel Butt backed him indignantly; his gentlemanly character outraged, his generous nature humiliated by such a barefaced insinuation.

"You insult me, Mr. Culver," the Colonel protested. "You pain me, sir. Remember, I represent General Miles."

"That's an old game, representing," Keith sneered, "and they play it a lot on Miles, pretending to be his interpreters—purchasing agents, scouts and what-not, Abbe Martin, Judge Partridge, Doc Harris and all that bunch of perambulating tin horns. How do I know you're not throwing in with them, Colonel, you and Wade?"

Colonel Butt dropped the reins of his big light chestnut cavalry horse, laying one hand on his short cavalry sword, the other on his revolver butt.

"I am a man of honor, sir," he asserted earnestly. "I hope you understand that I am, sir."

"And that I come from General Terry and not on my own hook," flashed Major Wade. "If you have doubts of my dependability, Culver, just recall that I fought at Fort Fisher when General Terry captured it."

"A lot of deserters say that," Keith countered.

The brown mole on the Major's other cheek flipped up and down as if he were chewing in his rage. His left hand jerked the reins to bring his huge dappled gray cavalry horse into a whirl, while his right hand reached for his pistol holster.

"Watch out, Keith," Ilo warned her cousin swiftly.

"Don't let him draw."

"Let me strip him, like I said," barked her father.

Ted leveled his Spencer rifle again, but Keith was quicker with the lariat. Like a striking rattler he flung the loop at the Major, settling it accurately on his head and shoulders.

Wade hesitated in his draw, instinctively throwing up one elbow to ward off the loop, but Keith jerked down hard, snaring the Major's fighting arm. Wade had loosened the butt of his service revolver. His hand slipped in Keith's binding tug. The weapon clattered on the ground. Wade followed it with a thud of his fat body, pulled clear out of the saddle as young Culver spun River Gleam and dragged him.

"The Colonel's gunning, Keith," Ilo augmented her warning. "Look out, cousin boy—look out, there."

Colonel Butt was drawing also, but more laggardly, as if he must do it with fitting Southern ceremony and innate, inherent courtesy.

CHAPTER 5

Arkansas Swamp Water

TED ROSS' horn-like voice warned Ilo herself.

"Duck, Ilo," came the fatherly caution. "Keep your head, and your pony's head, well down."

Ross fired over her hair, over Dust Storm's forelock, perforating the Colonel's holster and sending the pistol flying from his stung fingers.

With his unlamed hand, Colonel Butt started to unsheath, but with a second shot Ted made his threatened snip and, its belt strap neatly cut, the Colonel's scabbard kited after the revolver.

Still Butt was no quitter. He dug into an inner vest pocket under his uniform and pulled out a small but efficiently barreled derringer, taking Ross quite off guard by his sudden move.

Ilo, however, her head still ducked, was peering like a young eagle.

Her riding quirt slashed out, as fast as a hawk's wing. The birdlike, darting lash clawed tightly round Butt's derringer and struck it out of his grip.

"You young Mexican!" censured the Colonel, retaining little of his politeness. "I'll—"

"No, Colonel, no, not Mexican," Ilo broke in on him sweetly. "Although I learned a good deal about the lash from an old Mex herder."

"Señorita, then," spluttered Butt, "with your Spanish—"

"Not Spanish skill, either, Colonel," she laughed. "Just pure Kansas luck, and practising on flies."

Major Wade's clipped voice rose up from the ground, denouncing her as he saw Butt's chance of freeing him from the rope loop in which he rolled so deftly frustrated.

"Condemned Kansas hussy!" he chattered angrily. "Too good-looking for Mex or Don, can't you see, Colonel? Where were you staring—into her eyes? She must have charmed you before she struck like a snake."

The Major's criticism recalled his plight to the Colonel, and the Colonel was a gentleman still. Even though disarmed, he wheeled his horse and went bare-handed to help Wade, calling out to the troopers to intercept Keith Culver on his running pony.

Keith saw the troopers temporarily leave the stock and start to head him. He yelled to Ted Ross without stopping his brisk canter.

"Hitch my trail team to my wagon, there, Ted," he directed. "My trail outfit's in it, so you and Ilo pull over to your house and throw your own stuff in. We'd better be going out of here and going fast. I'll meet you there."

"All right, Keith, and I'll put on a lead team to your wheelers," Ross suggested.

"And don't miss us at the house, mind, Keith," Ilo added. "Major's harmless now. Better slip your rope and out across the flat, too."

"In a minute," promised Keith. "Wade still has his sword, you notice, I want to shake him away from that before I coil up, you bet."

Ilo and her father jumped off, took a quick look

at the returning troopers galloping back from the corrals and sprang to Keith's covered wagon with its bowed canvas top spread over his traveling gear, blanketed bed and cooking paraphernalia heaped up inside. Keith's lead team of blacks grazed in the yard, and swiftly father and daughter traced them up. The troopers were riding hard, halfway across the gentle slope to the valley, as Ted Ross grabbed the lines.

"I'll drive, Ilo," he decided. "You lead Lion, will you? And ride right handy just in case the Army fellows try to interfere."

"O. K., Dad, off you go," she nodded. "Keep throwing the rawhide. We haven't much time, or distance, to spare if we're going to clear them."

Ilo seized Lion's rein as she mounted her own pony and led her father's tawny horse off at a fast clip, riding close by the turning wheels. Meanwhile Ted circled with the wagon and rolled it across the limits toward their own gray, vine-covered house backed by the ridge groves of trees and all trellised round at the edges of its encircling flower beds, which were already showing the flame of spring bulbs.

Keith Culver was stubbornly dragging Major Wade along in spite of Colonel Butt's close pursuit and the nearness of the troopers, skidding him on in the general direction of the rim of the Marsh of Whooping Cranes.

From the direction Keith was taking, Ilo and her father guessed his intent when they pulled out and made their dash homeward, although they were too far away to hear the words their partner addressed to

Major Wade.

"Told you I'd duck you in the Marsh if you stuck your nose in here once more," Keith reminded the scuffling Northerner, "and that's where you're sliding so greasily now, Major Wade. Isn't far across the valley bottleneck. Smell the swamp water? Sniffs better than Kentucky whiskey in the spring, eh, Colonel Butt?"

"Condemn you, Kansas cuss," gritted the Major.

"That's what you used to call Bob Armstrong," snickered Keith, "if my memory hasn't slipped a cog. As I was just telling Captain Paul Hull of the Red River hunters north a ways, yonder, I'm the other cuss from Kansas."

"Robert Armstrong," echoed the Major, clipping the name off like the snap of a jump trap. "Armstrong—yes—he scooted for Canada and—"

"Scouted," corrected Keith in swift interruption. "Remember, now, you're speaking of a personal friend and partner of mine and Ted Ross. The R C A combination is a unit."

"Scouted, then," conceded the Major grimly. "But I've an account to thresh out with Bob Armstrong, and as soon as Colonel Butt and I have settled the Sioux here, we're marching for the Canadian boundary to do it."

"Well, Bob's good at threshing things, and if he needs help, maybe he'll get it when you find him," predicted Keith significantly. "Also, since it's Sioux you're looking for, I'll show you one in a minute."

Major Wade ejected his remarks in irritated jerks,

for he had managed to grip his short cavalry sword, and he was making backhand slashes through the whirl of dust in which Culver dragged him, attempting to sever the lariat.

The pungent dust stung his nostrils and caused his eyes to smart, so that he missed with most of his passes, and Keith's constant snagging of the rope round his saddle horn, to roll the Major from side to side, did not help the sword blows any. Colonel Butt sprinted closer and closer in his race with River Gleam. Several times Butt got near enough to try seizing the Major's weapon, but each time he lost ground.

"Toss it, Major," he appealed, tearing along beside. "Throw your blade. I can catch it, sir."

They were at the edge of the Marsh of Whooping Cranes.

River Gleam's hoofs struck the shallows among the first rimming rushes. The water splashed. Major Butt's body brought up suddenly against the body of the dead Sioux Flame Eye.

That was the moment the Major made his sword cast to Colonel Butt.

By good luck Wade threw it before he unknowingly collided with the prone Flame Eye. Had he waited a second longer, it would have been jarred from his hand. But he tossed it skillfully, grip first, to Colonel Butt.

The Colonel caught it smoothly, his practised hand snaking into the flying sword grip in mid-air, and with a reverse swing he cut down at Keith's rope

where its looped end had tangled round both Wade and Flame Eye.

Keith splashed out on his pony, his lariat dangling weightless now; and at the easing of the drag, River Glean put on fiery speed as his rider reined him off over the Ross river benches.

The troopers thundering from the corrals swerved a bit, uncertain whether or not to risk angling away to block his direction. A sharp command from Colonel Butt urged them on to the Marsh.

"Major Wade will drown, face down," the Colonel yelled. "Haul him out."

Butt grabbed the cut rope end, whipped so tightly around Wade and the Sioux that Wade could not rise to his feet even in the shallows, and heaved hard.

Keith, riding high away from them, looked back.

He saw the troopers gallop into the water to the Colonel's aid and, without stopping to cut the entangled Wade and Flame Eye apart, derrick both onto the back of a calvaryman's mount and wheel off to the Culver house where the dappled gray and the light chestnut horses still stood in the yard.

Keith watched, while he pushed his pony faster.

The Army men worked fast, too.

Keith glimpsed them prying Wade and the Sioux apart and laying the dead Flame Eye on the doorstep of his ranch house.

Then the Colonel hopped up on his big chestnut.

The troopers raised the cursing, dripping Major into the saddle of the dappled gray, paused only a minute to throw up the top bars of the corrals to

hold the commandeered cattle and horses till they returned shortly, and then all came on in dust-spurting pursuit.

Keith jumped to it and rode harder than ever, but he did not put spurs to River Gleam or use the quirt on the speeding pony. Instead, he lay low over River Gleam's bounding forequarters, stroking his neck and speaking in his ear as if the horse were quite human.

"Stretch it, River Gleam," he urged, laughing playfully. "Don't ever have it said in Missouri that a cavalry mount ever caught you after a head start."

Keith gave him the trick sign on either side of his muscled neck, waving his right hand, swinging the left, sometimes directing him with a mere shift of the body, arm or leg without a spoken word of command.

Like the brown runner of Captain Paul Hull of the Red River Free People, which Keith had admired so much, River Gleam had been trained as a three-year-old to hunt the buffalo.

Now the Culver pony showed his breeding and his skillful training, pulling away from the pursuing cavalry on the valley level with something to spare, climbing the low ridge crowned by the Ross homesite and bursting with a whirlwind of gravel into the wagon yard.

CHAPTER 6

River Imp Burt, Covered Wagon Driver

IN THE Ross wagon yard Ted Ross had moved Keith's team of blacks into the lead position and was tracing up his own gray matched pair as wheelers.

Ilo and their foreman, Rider Imp Burt, were hurriedly loading the Ross gear from the house, the girl putting in her own necessities of clothing and domestic equipment, Rider Imp shouldering the bigger bundles from the kitchen doorway to the wagon tailboard.

Imp was well named, or nicknamed. He looked like an imp, staggering on his bowed legs under the bags, his dented gray sombrero hung handy on the wheel hub. His acorn-shaped head, capped with coffee-colored hair, was bent by the teetering weight of the awkward burdens, and his smoky fawn eyes peered from beneath the lashings where his powerful, long, snake-like arms were wound. Passing swiftly from lamplight to shadow, his ashen face seemed like the visage of one from the world beyond; nose, cheeks, mouth and chin carved flat as a bas-relief. He wore a violent orange shirt, a leather vest with filled cartridge loops and ordinary blue overalls, in place of chaps, folded haphazardly into his range boots. A full cartridge belt handicapped his stride, and two loaded six-guns sagged on his hips, but Rider Imp did not mind apparently, for he swore by and slept with his weapons, accepting the added impost as quite a matter of course and boring ahead deter-

minedly.

The pygmy giant had been christened Impman in the State of Oregon, after his trail breaker grandfather, but the boys of the R C A had soon shortened it to Imp and had bestowed the decoration of Rider Imp when they found out he could ride anything from a pampas steer to a wild Blackfoot pinto.

"Hurry, Imp," Ilo begged as she heard the thud of pounding hoofs coming up the rise. "There's Keith burning the grass and showering sand, and the U. S. Cavalry are after him as sure as sundown."

"Footing it fast, Miss Ilo," grinned Rider Imp. "Any faster and I'd trip over my shadow, plumb certain."

"I'm counting on you to drive, Burt," Ted Ross restrained him, "so don't break a leg."

"'Course I'll drive," Burt accepted, "though I'd rather ride. Never missed a fracas yet, and this looks like it'll be a doggone shoot-out before we get through with has-been Yanks and Confederates, French-Canadian half-breeds, border Injun tribes and white scalpers in that simmering Northwest you elect to head for thataway, yonder, where the metis camp-fires blaze."

Burt nodded under his bundles toward the lower valley of the Rainbow Fork of the Missouri River, flowing down from the northward on the eastern side of the buffalo pastures threaded by Smoky Hill Fork, Solomon's Fork and the Republican Fork.

There in the falling dark, on the edge of vast country running over the Nebraska line, gleamed fires evi-

dently just kindled by the metis who had passed in that direction.

"The Free People, eh?" speculated Ted Ross, sparing a glance in his hurry.

"Yes, Captain Paul Hull's band, I guess," pondered Ilo in momentary reminiscence. "Now I wonder if—"

Ilo paused as River Gleam lurched into the yard and Keith stopped him in a smoking slide. She stared anxiously for a second at Keith's exhilarated face fanned by the funnel-shaped light of the lamp from inside the kitchen window and door.

"Keith, you didn't hurt the Major—bad, that is?" she asked dubiously.

"Hurt his pride worst, I reckon," replied her cousin, laughing softly, as he recalled the vivid spectacle the Major made in the Marsh. "If his uniform shows red spots, don't think he's dying in the saddle. It's only the Sioux strain where he rolled on Flame Eye. Good aboriginal blood at that, from a chief's veins. Nothing to be ashamed of. They dumped Flame Eye on my porch and chased away like the very mischief."

Rider Imp Burt shook his acorn head while he heaved his last bundle into the wagon.

"That was some careless of them, Keith," he deplored. "If any Yankton Sioux or Cheyenne country hunters mosey by and find Flame Eye in your yard, they'll connect him up with you and sure carry their suspicions to White Cap at the Canadian boundary."

"I'm not worrying about White Cap—now," declared Keith scornfully. "All we got to do at present is lose this mob of troopers. Who's teamster, Riding Imp?"

"Burt's teamster," put in Ted Ross, hooking up his final trace and throwing the grays' and blacks' lines over the dash.

Keith regarded Burt with warning solemnity spoiled by a persistent trace of ironical humor.

"Positive you're acquiescent to mix in, Rider Imp?" he inquired. "Willing to maybe get shot or hung by U. S. Cavalry? Chance scalping by White Cap's Sioux? Remember that friendly Free People in Missouri, Arkansas, Kansas, Nebraska and Dakota can't choose but be our enemies once we're over the border helping the Northwest Mounted Police frown down their insurrection. But then, you weren't called direct, Imp, so I might get you exempt in case of festering trouble or a dangerous blow-up."

"I wear my exemption papers on me," chuckled Rider Imp, slapping his hips. "Couple of good, blue stamp dies, size .45. I'll get me my rifle, too, to decorate the dash."

Rider Imp made a dive into the dark Ross bunkhouse across the way and came out, Winchester repeater in hand, retrieving his sombrero and hopping from wheel hub to driver's seat with all his guns shining encouragingly in the lamp's glint.

"Well, you still have the overland upswing," Keith lauded his agility, "so I guess you're off."

"Yah," confirmed Burt in his peculiar saw-screech

voice, "I'm exhibiting now. Down south Tennessee horse show, gents, driving four-in-hand. But, mind, I'd rather ride than drive."

"You sure look like a prize winner," Keith bantered. "Ought to have a medal. You'd pose grand with a Northwest Rebellion medal pinned to your leather vest underneath those brassy cartridge loops, Burt. That is, if there are any Northwest Rebellion medals stamped."

"Or any Northwest Rebellion," amended Rider Imp in his doubtful piping voice.

"Don't fool yourself," advised Keith. "If it breaks, it'll come like a thunderstorm and pass like a Chinook wind. I notice Ilo is taking a farewell look around. Maybe you'll be home again, before you realize it, Ilo, you and your dad."

Ilo's glance over the premises was lingering. She momentarily fussed with the curtains, toed the oil-cloth on the floor, even broke off a few of the brilliant blooms in the varicolored flower bed, which nodded red, yellow, orange, amethyst, purple, pink and blue heads in the lamp glow under the window. Then she blew out the lamp.

"Are the Indians that strong up there, Indians and metis, too, Keith?" she probed, as she mounted Dust Storm in the dark.

"I don't know just how strong all the tribes are," Keith told her, "but I do know how many of the camps that Bart Chester and I saw when we hunted around there shaped up."

"How many?"

"Big Bear of the South Crees has five hundred men," Keith estimated. "Little Pine has almost as many, maybe four hundred and fifty. Then there's Chief Beardy's following, and One Arrow's. Poundmaker isn't so showy in men. Smallest number, not over one hundred and fifty, I'd guess, but Poundmaker's much more powerful than that in the Indian councils. Altogether round Battleford there must be more than two thousand Crees and three or four hundred Assiniboines. The Blackfeet are strong, into the bargain, with their young Bloods and Peigans always riding off on the war trail. Then all the Sioux are restless, too."

Ted Ross straddled his own yellow horse Lion again and wheeled round beside the loaded wagon.

"And how many men have the Mounted Police against them if they join the metis?" Ted inquired.

"Darn few, in that immediate district," Keith informed them. "Fifty men or so. Small detachments at Fort Carlton, Battleford, Fort Pitt, Calgary, and Prince Albert."

Rider Imp shook out his reins over the lead blacks and the gray wheelers.

"Mounted Police alone can't crush a rebellion," Imp predicted. "Takes militia. How's Canada fixed, Keith? Got lots handy to call out?"

"Militia," Keith nodded vaguely in the darkness, "but not handy, even at Winnipeg. Mileage from Toronto and Montreal would sure make a rider feel saddle sore. It figures out as a mighty long haul for troop trains, and the Canadian Pacific Railway's not

all built. There are troublesome gaps in that new C. P. R. steel. If the call-out comes, they'll call Montreal units and Ottawa units, points east, and Toronto regiments. They'll call the Queen's Own Rifles, the Royal Grenadiers, the Governor General's Bodyguards, the Governor General's Foot Guards, the York Rangers and more. There'll be Winnipeg soldiers and Battleford Rifles and Prince Albert Rifles and—"

Keith paused, holding up his hand as a signal for the start.

"Listen," he commanded.

The clatter of fast climbing hoofs rolled over the ridge behind.

"And likely U. S. Calvary nosing in with warrants for us," he finished.

"To blazes with warrants," defied Burt on the moving wagon swerving out of the yard.

"Toss the word to the R C A hands, when you pass them out on the Armstrong home range yonder," Keith directed. "Tell them to ride in back of the troopers and kick those top rails off the corrals. Look after the houses while we're gone, and scatter the stock most promiscuous—those are their final orders."

"Yah," chuckled Rider, "I'll put them wise. Not a bona fide sale, eh?"

"Bona fide nothing," Keith snorted. "I got no U. S. Army vouchers. They get no beef or saddle horses."

Burt hurled the message from his swaying vehicle to the R C A boys gathered round their own chuck wagon and tiny cooking fire just at the limits of the

old Armstrong homestead down the other slope of the ridge.

"Right you are, Burt," the R C A hands chorused. "Pronto, you say? O. K. We're off."

The cooking fire went black.

The chuck wagon's wheels churned.

The R C A riders sprang to their saddles.

"What about that condemned Flame Eye?" inquired Burt of Keith, bolting after him. "He bothers me, lying like a piece of circumstantial evidence, on your doorstep. Should I hail the boys to move him?"

"No," decided Keith, "tip them off to keep away from him till he's found."

"Won't be long," chirruped Burt. "Flame Eye's a big chief. Once he's missing, he's as good as found. Those Sioux are clannish and awful curious."

"Sooner he's found, the better," Keith figured. "Prints of U. S. Calvary boots and tracks of troopers' horses all round him make good coverage for me."

"Maybe," doubted the covered wagon driver as he paused only a second to tip off the R C A boys and then swung unerringly through the blackness out onto the Rainbow Fork trail with the three riders heeling him hard.

CHAPTER 7

Nurse Ruby Fleury Sings, "Goodbye, Missouri"

Ilo turned momentarily in her saddle on the trail and sent a ghostly wave through the gloom, waved back at the home ridge echoing to the hoof beats.

"Goodbye, Missouri," she murmured.

Like an echo the words came back to her from the walls of the rambling Armstrong house they were passing off to their right, across a little creek between the corral ground and the riders' camp site where the chuck wagon had vacated the hollow.

Between the creek waters and the house porch spread the cultivated fields in which Indian corn, tobacco and hemp were grown, and a light bathed the ploughed slope.

"Goodbye, Missouri—"

For an instant she took it for a real echo thrown faintly off the clapboards, but when the farewell was followed by other words she had not spoken herself, she understood that it was the voice of Cousin Ruby Fleury, on Keith's mother's side, hailing her from the nearby homestead.

"Goodbye, Missouri, honey, and where do you think you are heading?"

Cousin Ruby Fleury's voice, heard coming out of the porch with its closed shutters, was a deep contralto voice, a voice with a sympathetic motherly note and carrying the timbre of authority, for Ruby was in sole possession here at present. Now that Bob Armstrong was absent and others of the family vis-

iting at intervals with their kin in Kansas City and neighboring towns, Cousin Ruby was the efficient manager and temporary overseer of the A Section of the R C A.

"Land's sakes, Ilo, what's all the exodus?" Ruby demanded. "You and your dad and Keith and a jammed full covered wagon and—yes, the hit-and-miss tattoo of shod hoofs behind you. And some not shod—those Army horses are always throwing their shoes. Cavalry, by the rate they clatter. Don't tell me you're all running away from them, child. Likewise, where to, sweetness?"

"To Canada, Ruby," Ilo explained, going on to disclose all in one breath about Keith's Indian fight, the telegram, the commandeering, Major Wade, Colonel Butt, Bob Armstrong, Bart Chester, Flame Eye, White Cap, Captain Paul Hull with his Free People from that troublesome land fomented by Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont and their aides Lepine, O'Donohue, Boyer, Nolan and many more over the far boundary which was now their own destination.

"Canada," gasped Cousin Ruby, like a deep-toned singer stretching for a high note. "But not alone, honey! Surely, not alone."

Ruby Fleury shoved the porch shutters open in her earnest perturbation, the yellow light of the lantern she had picked up painting her there with a magical brush of ocher and umber. She was tall, massive, as deep-bosomed as she was deep-voiced. More elderly-looking than a cousin she loomed, rather like the figure of an aunt. Had she been black-

skinned, she would have been well suited to the appellation of Auntie Ruby or Mammy Fleury, but she was white, and her training as a nurse in Civil War days made her scrupulously white, hygienic, with a refreshing personal perfume that suggested the wild fragrance of mountain flowers and the watery plunge of prairie streams.

The lantern light tinged her wavy chestnut hair, sparkled in brown eyes as soft, as round, as large as beautiful pansies, spread over fresh, humorous, ruddy cheeks and enticingly curved nose like the caressing fingers of a playful babe. The rays rippled downward when she moved, turning her sulphur-colored dress, with its chocolate trimmings, to woven gold that matched the two yellow bracelets on the firm, round wrists above her slender-fingered, well-kept hands.

"Not away up there alone, Ilo dear!"

"I'm not alone, Ruby. There's Dad, and I, and Keith, and Rider Imp Burt, you see."

"But women folks, I mean, Ilo. You'll sure need some tall female to look after you and to companion and to chaperone you. That means me. If you're dead-set on going, I just got to go along—if only for your mother's sake. We don't want history to repeat itself so soon."

Ilo looked thoughtful for a brief moment while the Cavalry elatter rose clearer.

"Hardly that much danger, Ruby," she belittled the risk, "although it would be nice to have a girl friend along."

Ruby leaned farther out of the porch shutters and patted her shoulder maternally.

"I'm not taking any chances with you, Ilo," she asserted determinedly. "This is a sudden call, so far as that, but I'm used to it, nursing and all. So here goes. I'll clutch my kit and leave a note for the folks to read when they come back."

Ruby set down the lantern and took up the first aid bag and the personal equipment bag, both waiting handy, which advertised her intermittent, overstate nursing pilgrimage of mercy. She put them on the ledge of the porch, stuck a Springfield rifle through the handles and scribbled a swift note, pinning it to the table inside.

She jiggled the lantern, so that it puffed out, and hoisted her stuff into the wagon, climbing up to the seat with Burt.

"You yippee to the boys that I'm gone, too, will you, Rider Imp?" she requested cheerfully. "My voice goes to the bottom of our well, but somehow it won't hit the hill tops when I screech out."

Burt grinned appreciatively and nodded, pleased as a suitor might be.

"Sure, I'll bawl them the good news," he assented. "Though your voice is lovely, Ruby. I adore to hear you sing 'Deep River' and 'Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child' and all those spirituals and plantation ditties and things."

Ruby elbowed his brassy cartridge belt into his ribs, making room for herself on the driver's seat.

"Rider Imp, you young flatterer," she snickered,

"drive on. I hear those troopers plainer every minute."

Not over a mile or so behind now, Colonel Butt and Major Wade were evidently leading their troopers at a terrific clip.

"Drive, Rider Imp, you leather pusher," urged his companion on the seat.

"Yah, I'm away, Ruby, but you see how it balks me, kind of, at first, feeling that I'd rather—"

"I know," she interrupted. "You'd rather ride than drive. So would I. We'll bog the blame wagon at the first quicksand crossing in Canada and get us a couple of wild mustangs to straddle and ride. Roll along."

Butt yodeled to the R C A riders in the range vernacular to tell them that their attractive factor Ruby Fleury was departing with the Ross and Culver outfit.

The answer came back in a plaintive howl, sadder than coyote calls, for all the hands liked Ruby better than cigarettes or grub.

From the distance, angling in behind the speeding U. S. Calvary, the R-C A riders struck up a song that suited their mood:

"Kansas City lights are growing dim

"On the old Missouri trail

"Under stars and moon so pale

"As we head toward the Rocky Mountains' rim—"

"Wasn't that what you were saying, Ilo, when I butted in?" demanded Ruby.

"I guess that's how it sounded," admitted Ilo. "Though I wasn't thinking—specially."

"In other words—?"

"Goodbye, Missouri," Ilo repeated. "Yes, that fits, all right—the title of their tune."

"You calculate we'll be out from under the home roof long, honey?" Ruby queried.

Ilo laughed softly as she reined Dust Storm through the dark beside the rolling wagon.

"Keith boasts we'll be there and back before the hearthstones are cold," she reminded the cavalcade.

"Great ghosts alive; our fireplace won't hold coals that long," declared Ruby.

Keith Culver laughed, too, at his cousin's sly dig about his prophetic powers.

"Speaking figuratively," he hedged.

Burt on the booming wagon was measuring the pursuers' advance by the sounds in his cocked ear.

"Won't ever need to worry over the back-trip if we don't make plumb sure of breaking away," philosophized the driver. "You picked the best spot to stand them off yet, Keith?"

"Yes, make for the metis camp," Keith directed.

He pointed toward the lights of that camp, lights which blinked deceptively close ahead.

CHAPTER 8

The Camp of Free People

ON THE Plateau of the Painted Arrow, overlooking the Rainbow Fork of the Missouri River, the scouts of Captain Paul Hull of the Free People, riding in advance of the Red River carts, stopped their horses and indicated with upraised arms the advantageous position for the hunters' night camp beside the water.

Immediately the long line of the caravan came on and bunched on the eminence. For a moment its vehicles, cart horses, buffalo runners and loaded trail equipment were all blackly silhouetted, with the picturesque figures of men, women and children on top, against the rose sky of the west where the sun had dropped already.

"Hurry up," Paul Hull gave the order. "It will soon be dark. Set the circle of carts and tents. Put the horses inside and get the cooking fires going. Send out the fire lighters to light the sentinel fires, too, and place the guards. Remember those Sioux are somewhere around, not so far from this camp."

"At once, Captain Paul," responded Hull's lieutenants, springing off to their various duties of establishing the armed night bivouac. "We shall soon be ready for anybody who comes this way."

With sleight-of-hand swiftness the camp arose, where only minutes before had been nothing but the bare flatness of the plateau. The carts backed around in a wide circle, shafts stabbing inward, wheels locked close against the possible attempt of a Sioux break-

through. Tents stood up, the travois poles darkly crisscrossing the horizon sky among the early evening stars, ringing the enclosure where their precious horses were well guarded against any Indian run-off and the cooking kettles slung in comparative safety from disturbance. Smoke from the supper fires perfumed the river valley and carried on its ghostly eddies savory smells of stewing and roasting.

Inside the tepee ring with its cone-shaped curves of stretched skins warmly reflecting the fire glow, the watchful tension of hunt and travel was past. It was the moment of gay relaxation over the preparation of the meal, an interval of companionable mingling as each carried out his assigned work, a larking hour shot through with the merry, whistling calls of children playing hide-and-seek among the tents, the snapping of burned fingers echoing above the crackling of the sticks, the luring laughter and talk of the dark-eyed, rose-skinned French Canadian beauties in costumes as brilliant as the leaping flames they bent over, with the rich head shawls draped back across their shapely shoulders to protect them from sparks.

Outside the cart barricade another ring of sentinel fires hooped the whole camp with a flame belt laid down by the fire lighters, casting an illumination which shadowy intruders would have to cross if they risked evasion of the *soldat* guards pacing the round of the starry blazes, from the fall of dark till the sun should rise over the Mississippi River Basin away off to the eastward of their plateau.

Driving at full speed for this crimson circlet burning on the elevation, Rider Imp Burt was steering the covered wagon, with the three ridden mounts flanking it, straight for the *soldat* guards, and the rumble of the whizzing wheels and the staccato hoof drumming hit the tent walls in voluminous vibration that echoed alarmingly in the Freeman's camp.

The nearest *soldat* guard sang out a warning that there were strangers on the trail in the distance.

Paul Hull had just called together his councillors and was planning the hunt and mapping the course for the next day, sitting by the fires, when the guard's warning sounded out and the echoes multiplied noisily in indication of a fairly strong cavalcade. He jumped up with his men and waved them toward the carts.

"Look after the barrier," he directed. "I'll see who this is."

The councillors seized their weapons and ran to their posts of defense round the cart barricade.

The women about the fires looked anxiously on all sides, whispering in groups.

"Can it be the Sioux?"

"No, there are not enough horses."

"Also ridden by whites, according to the sound."

"A prairie schooner, too, by the roll."

They took precautions, however, even while they speculated and uncertainly, delaying the meal and preparing to back the men in case of emergency. One member of the largest group detached herself from the rest and followed Paul Hull down to the fire ring. She was a young, girlish member, evidently

unmarried. Her attitude contrasted with the reaction of the other feminine listeners, for where their mood was one of sudden suspense and anxiety, hers was more one of interest and curiosity.

Other things, too, marked her off from her companions. Instead of the usual head shawl, she wore a gay silk, ruddy scarf which bound her wavy dark hair like a ribbon of light and fell in enchanting folds back from her flower-stem neck. Her blouse seemed one with the scarf, of fine linen, ecru, laundered freshly, as if she had just stepped off the boulevards. The blouse front was laced with red, and the same red belted her slimly, letting the bronze satin of her skirt billow out below in lovely folds which somehow betrayed, rather than concealed, her lithe figure, supple, pliant, delicate, refined. Not embroidered moccasins of ravishing design such as the Freewomen liked to make and to wear, but beige leather slippers with low heels, which could be kicked off suddenly when moccasins appeared necessary, covered her small, alert feet, which were plainly used to dancing and pedalling at musical instruments.

She kicked them off now, in the moment of alarm, and toyed with them, uncertain whether or not to slip on her trail footgear and to display a weapon like the rest.

"Is it a Sioux attack, Paul?" she asked as she caught Hull at the barrier.

"It's hard to tell, from the inside, Lily," the leader answered. "Too many echoes ringing back and forth, but we'll see in a minute."

The ~~soldat~~ guard in front of them challenged sharply in the space of the fire ring.

"Halt! Who comes?"

"The R C A, Ross-Culver-Armstrong outfit," squeaked Rider Imp. "Put up those brass-bound trade guns. And don't start ordering us off on our ground. Ain't you savvying you're squatting on our lease in the R section of the R C A Range?"

Keith Culver laughed at Rider Imp's vehemence.

"Yes, it's friends on the ride, Captain Paul," Keith called. "Culver, you know, and my partner, Ted Ross, of the R section."

"How do, Hull," Ross blared heartily. "Hope you struck good wood and plenty of water."

"Most excellent," declared Captain Paul, beaming his thanks, the light of the sentinel fires revealing the smile on his face. "I must apologize for challenging your party."

"No need," Ross told him, laughing. "Don't wonder. My foreman Rider Imp Burt makes a wagon noise like a band of Sioux."

Paul Hull turned toward the covered wagon seat.

"Burt?" he chuckled reminiscently. "You are Driver Impman Burt of—?"

"Rider Imp," corrected the Ross Ranch foreman. "I'd rather ride than drive any day in the—"

"Were you born in Oregon, Rider Imp?" asked Hull with a sudden, intense curiosity.

"Yep."

"Are you any relation of Oregon Impman Burt?"

"Grandson. Grandpap Oregon Impman Burt went

in there in 1834 or 1835 with a countryman of yours."

"You mean?"

"La Ramie, your Free Trapper, of course," grinned Rider Imp triumphantly. "History isn't recording much concerning La Ramie, but Grandpap handed down a lot about your fellow French-Canadian blazing his name all over the landscape and changing Fort William, that Bill Sublette and Bob Campbell built in 1834, to Fort Laramie. Handed it down to Pap. Pap handed it to me. Pap was born on the Oregon Trail. Young blade, then, when 'Pathfinder' Fremont went through and all those 'forty-niners tagged along."

CHAPTER 9

Lily Lewis, Secretary to Madame Forget

CAPTAIN PAUL HULL was staring at Burt in a sort of comradely ecstasy, the glow of personal interest firing his whole face now and adding extra warmth to his friendly, winning smile.

"Your father's name?" the Captain asked.

"'Parkman' Burt," Rider Imp informed him proudly. "Nicknamed him after a writing chap; Francis Parkman, who wandered round Fort Laramie with a note book. Pap chummed with Francis most a year, and Francis taught him the writing game. Not a bad legacy—a nickname and literary instruction. I figure a lot of that vivid color and Northwest atmosphere in 'The Oregon Trail' book is 'Grandpap's and Pap's—and mine.'"

Paul Hull laughed softly, fraternally, his merriment as musical as his words.

"And mine," he confided to Rider Imp and to the others. "You see, my grandfather made history out in Oregon with yours."

Rider Imp gaped blankly.

"His cognomen, Captain Paul?" he demanded finally.

"La Ramie," the Captain informed him. "Jacques Hull La Ramie, to give him his full name and title, but we Free People have taken, according to custom, only the family name on the mother's side."

"Humph!" exploded Rider Imp. "And your father's name?"

"Herbert Hull," Paul enlightened him. "He was with Jim Bridger and Tom 'Broken Hand' Fitzpatrick and Milton Sublette when they bought out the Fort and then sold it to the American Fur Company."

"By crickeys, yep, I remember," nodded Burt. "Pap did converse profanely quite often with him. Herbert, you contend? Sure—H. H., they termed him."

They were always confabbing, trading and trafficking with Bridger, with 'Broken Hand' Fitzpatrick and Sublette. I tell you, Jim, Tom and Milton cleaned up fine when they dealt a stockade full of log cabins to John Jacob Astor so that he could go in for adobe."

"Just so," beamed the Captain. "But don't tell me you're hitting the Oregon Trail again."

Hull's swift, dark eyes had run over the gray team of leaders, the black wheelers, the bundled traveling gear in the covered wagon, had lighted on Ruby Fleury perched beside Burt and on Ilo Ross riding between her father and Keith Culver.

"So we three do meet again," he continued, swift as his glance, before the wagon driver could answer. "I was hoping, you recall. And I'm still hoping that yours is the Canada and not the Oregon Trail."

"You get your wish, Captain Paul," laughed Ilo lightly. "Canada Trail. Five friends instead of two you're going to have."

"That is if he wants so much company," put in Keith Culver with a tentative laugh.

"Oh! assuredly," cried Captain Paul. "We Free People are honored indeed. If you had spoken of your start—"

"It was at the last minute that I fully decided, or maybe was impelled, to go along, and Nurse Ruby Fleury with me," Ilo confessed naively. "Ruby, my very best friend, Captain Paul."

Paul Hull welcomed Ruby, with his tipped hat and sweeping bow offering her the freedom of the established camp.

"I am glad you so decided, *Mademoiselle Fleury*," he observed warmly, "both for *Mademoiselle Ilo's* sake and for my own. It is luck to have a nurse on the trail. Nurses are pretty scarce on the other side of the Medicine Line. (the border)."

"And likely will be needed soon, eh, Captain Paul?" hazarded Keith. "On account of this Rebellion business in Canada?"

"Who knows?" propounded Hull vaguely.

"Ruby is a cousin of mine," Keith joked it off, "so we'll be well looked after. Finger on your pulse every day if you should require same. Spoon feed, too, if you are crippled."

Ruby laughed her deep-bosomed, alto laugh.

"Ilo's chaperone, mostly," she belittled her professional standing as a nurse.

"It will work both ways, *Mademoiselle Ruby*. With your looks you will need one yourself."

"Guardian, then," tittered Ruby.

"And again, somebody must guard you."

"Godmother, too."

"And you so young, *Mademoiselle Fleury*?" the Captain flattered gallantly. "Speaking of cousins, here is one of my own, Lily Levis. Lily is Secretary to

Madame Marie Forget, wife of *Monsieur* Forget who is slated as a coming Lieutenant-Governor of the Northwest Territories. Lily, you will be glad to meet my friends Impman Burt, Ted Ross and Keith Culver and to have white lady companions in Madame Forget's class."

"My goodness, I am delighted," breathed Lily.

She tapped her shoe soles together excitedly with her supple musician's fingers. Her hazel eyes, large, luring, all flecked with golden lights, danced vivaciously, and the color in her beautiful Parisienne's cheeks surged deeper in a veritable flood of welcome. Then she seemed to realize that she was in her stocking feet and promptly slipped on her shoes again with a ringing laugh.

"What a way to greet you," Lily burst out. "Slippers in my hands instead of gloves, perhaps. In another minute it would have been moccasins. I tell you, *Mademoiselle* Ilo, *Mademoiselle* Ruby—or shall I say merely Ilo and Ruby? Yes, that is more companionable. Let me assure you, Ilo and Ruby, your faces are far sweeter than ugly Sioux faces."

The two girls laughed with her, marvelling at her own artistic features, her sensitive, fragile nose, rosebud lips, porcelain-white teeth, and roguish chin with the charm of a dimple in it.

"Not painted, you mean, Lily," chaffed Ruby.

"You make us feel like genuine Free People," Ilo thanked her. "Lily, do you really belong to them yourself? You see, your gifts of speech and appearance, with Captain Paul's comment, somehow makes us believe you know more of the civilized world."

So Lily explained with gesture and pose that revealed all the dramatic qualities of her nature and disposition.

"Not actually of the Free People," she pointed out, "for I was born in Québec. I have been back east visiting at home before rejoining *Madame* and *Monsieur* Forget at Regina. Owing to the unsettled times, they have moved the new capital of the Northwest Territories to Regina, you understand."

"You must have just come out of that Saskatchewan trouble country, then?" Keith cut in.

"Oh, yes, we were altogether beyond the end-of-steel of the new C. P. R. at Moose Jaw and Bob Armstrong's stage coach station there."

"Whose station?" demanded Ted Ross quickly. "You mean Kansas Bob's?"

Lily nodded mischievously, stirred by some humorous recollection of that outpost.

"Yes, that Kansas cuss," she bubbled. "The nickname always makes me laugh, and it tickles me to-night. I hear you speak of the Ross-Culver-Armstrong Ranch. So this is Bob's homeland, eh?"

"Yes. So you've met Bob?" mused Keith beatifically.

"To be sure," Lily chattered. "At his dugout beyond Moose Jaw, by the end-of-steel. We had to stay overnight. It was so funny. I must tell you all about it in our camp here."

"In camp, of course," directed Captain Paul Hull. "Move in with us, my friends."

He waved Rider Imp Burt's wagon forward into the camp enclosure and beckoned the riders after it.

CHAPTER 10

Hoof Thunder

KEITH leaned from his saddle as he rode by and gave the Captain a hint.

"Maybe you've guessed that U. S. Cavalry were chasing us?" he volunteered.

"At first it might have been the Sioux," smiled Paul, "but now I hear military horses."

"We had a run-in with Major Wade and Colonel Butt, in charge of the commissariat, over their commandeering R C A stock," Keith explained.

Paul Hull made a motion toward the hunting grounds he had left that day.

"I can imagine," he replied. "I talked with the Cavalry on the trail myself. They were a little officious about my line of travel. For safety's sake, they told me politely."

"Safety's sake, that's good," Keith echoed with a sarcastic laugh.

"I hope you didn't leave the Major like Flame Eye," the Captain hazarded.

"No, he's riding hard," Keith observed pleasantly. "You'll have to speak sharp to stop him up."

The R C A party passed in.

Hardly had they cleared the sentinel's fire ring, when the Cavalry came up against it.

"Halt!"

The guards barked their warning for the second time that night.

"Who says 'halt'?" demanded the angry, incisive

voice of Major Wade.

"I do," Captain Paul Hull spoke coolly from beyond the blaze. "This is my camp."

"Yours?" fumed the Major. "Yet you shelter refugees in it—Keith Culver, Ted Ross and their outfit. I'm going to get warrants to serve on Culver. Interference with military duties, curtailment of supply, bodily assault and personal injury to officers."

"Not to mention damages to pride and to uniform," ridiculed Hull. "You can't serve U. S. warrants in the camp of Free People."

"Can't we, sir?" put in Colonel Butt.

The Colonel lifted an expressive glove and saber to Major Wade.

Major Wade relayed the signal to his troopers.

"Charge!" the Major ordered. "Make an entrance so that we can serve any documents we have a mind to serve."

The troopers rode suddenly at the line of sentinel fires, but the *soldats'* guns cracked under the horses' heads, sending them rearing so that the Cavalry were forced to pull up momentarily.

"Do you want us to resort to artillery, sir?" spluttered the Colonel.

He gestured to the rear where the glow from the flames revealed the wagons and a field gun or two, with some vaguely indistinct Gatlings coming forward on wheels.

Paul Hull glanced at them and placed the responsibility on the officers.

"With the next shot you will have some empty

saddles," he told them.

"But you stand under United States law, even if you are Freemen," Wade declared.

"As Free People we have always had the inalienable right of traveling and of hunting," Paul reminded the Major. "We intend to keep that right."

The Northern Major and the Southern Colonel started in to argue the issue vehemently but another rolling sound of hoofs in the night made them all turn and listen.

Colonel Butt looked at Major Wade.

"I'm afraid, Major, any warrants we want to make out will have to wait for a while," decided the Colonel. "Those Sioux will require our most immediate attention, sir."

The hoof thunder rolled up from back of the Marsh of Whooping Cranes.

There Flame Eye's small band of Sioux, put to flight by the metis, had reformed hastily, calling in by signals other hunting parties of the drowned lands to their aid.

In the absence of Flame Eye, his brother Wild Elk was spokesman, and under Wild Elk's leadership they soon had assembled in formidable numbers again.

While the broken, scattered parties united, Wild Elk waited for Flame Eye to appear and to take charge once more of the mixed lot of Sioux—Tetons, Yanktons, some of Medicine Bear's men, outsiders of the Cheyennes, and a sprinkling of Yellow Hand's wanderers.

Flame Eye was still missing.

Wild Elk, looking them all over, gave an order at last, setting them on the move.

"We go to find my brother," he directed. "Something has happened to Flame Eye."

The drumming of their pony hoofs boomed along the old trail of the Red River carts around the Marsh to the spot where Keith Culver had escaped being ambushed, and there the evidence of the newer tracks diverted them abruptly toward the shallows. Like circling, crouching hounds the scouts nosed among the sedges.

"Feathers," announced White Deer, holding one up where Keith had downed the Sioux chief. "Quills from Flame Eye's headdress."

"It is my brother's," confirmed Wild Elk. "Wing pinions of the eagle."

"Blood," announced another scout, Shoot So Far. "Blood on the leaves and in the water."

"If it is Flame Eye's blood—" gurgled Wild Elk in ominous threat.

"Rope marks," pointed out Gray Goose, a third trailer. "Man with a lasso. Maybe Young Kansas Devil from the ranch. White man's pony prints—see!"

"And Army horses here," added No Meat, a fourth searcher, who had cast about until he had discovered the muddle of hoof impressions left by the tearing troopers. "Many Long Knives (American Cavalry) riding here."

Wild Elk gurgled again.

"That will be the Colonel chief, Goat Beard, and the Major chief, Scar Cheek, who were watching us,"

he deduced cunningly.

A yell from the Indian scouts indicated that they had found the cut-back of the trail to the ranch.

Instantly the whole band of Sioux was pelting angrily for the Culver farm house.

CHAPTER II

Shoot So Far Rides with News to White Cap

THE R C A hands had passed quietly ahead.

Leaving their chuck wagon in the wash below, they had just thrown the top rails off the horse and cattle corralls and let the stock roam when the clamoring echoes of the Sioux tumult shook the corral poles. The far-gathered bunch of cowboys, whose names ticked off their States right across the South, hid cautiously behind the horse corral nearest the house: Florida Fred Waite, Jim From Georgia Orde, Mississippi Mat Salter, Alabama Andy Cull, Louisiana Lou (Lou-Lou) Hackett, Texican Towers, all lugging out their guns.

Florida Fred, slim and sunbrowned as a Creole and with a lot of Creole ornaments on his hat band, sighted between the bars.

"Them red hellers, what do they want?" he snapped aggressively.

"Hold your fire, Florida," begged Jim From Georgia, a squat, bow-legged, one-time bee keeper on his Gulf grazing lease, who reminiscently wore gauntlets in place of wristlets and his bandana on the brim of his sombrero instead of on his neck.

"Yap, wait till they scatter afore we hang out a smoke cloud," counseled Mississippi Mat, a canal boat tower with distinctive features worthy of Old Man River himself.

"Mabbe they'll done burn the farm house," hazarded Alabama Andy, a man of watermelon lands

and corn fields, moon-faced, mellow-eyed, tanned so much darker than Creole-skinned Florida Fred that at first glance he looked colored.

"Anyways, daid hombres ain't a-gonna stop fires, is they, Alabama?" querulously asked Louisiana Lou Hackett, shifting his bent frame clad in Searchlight railroad overalls, in contrast to his pals' chaps; a frame of gigantic proportions developed mostly in working on the railroad and, apparently for diversion, riding locomotives to spell his range horse.

Alabama Andy Cull snickered..

"Not often, Lou-Lou," Alabam agreed, "though they do say as some dead coons inhabit purgatorial blazes and all those funny places."

Texican Towers took a post at the corral gate, both for its shielding protection and for a gun rest should long range shooting start from the Culver homstead. He riskily steadied his chin on top of the post, but his elongated nose had the curve of a saddle horn, and with the ten-gallon hat on top, his bucket-like head seemed just another spare saddle hung there. His black eyes, good as a telescope at a mile or two, were watching the Sioux flinging off their horses into the Culver yard and falling all over each other about the step where Colonel Butt and Major Wade had left the dead Flame Eye lying.

"Those condemned Sioux have gone and found him, first crack," announced Towers. "Couldn't miss him, lying out in the open like that."

"What do they say about it, Texican?" demanded Florida Fred Waite, failing to interpret their jabber-

ing.

"Yes, Texican," encouraged Jim From Georgia, "you savvy their lingo. Translate it for the anxious crowd."

Towers translated.

As well as knowing their sign language, he spoke the Sioux tongue itself quite fluently. Into the bargain he was well acquainted with Wild Elk, White Deer, Shoot So Far, Gray Goose, No Meat and others of the band. Out of the excited chattering around Keith Culver's doorway, the R C A boys were able to gather, through Texican's translation while he named the speakers in the wild dialogue, that Wild Elk's followers planned instant revenge.

"Who killed Flame Eye?" Wild Elk asked of the scouts, although he had arrived swiftly at his own definite conclusions.

"Young Kansas Devil," the scout Gray Goose justified an early suspicion. "See the piece of a lariat still binding Flame Eye."

"Lassoed and shot," agreed White Deer.

"And the Long Knives?" demanded Wild Elk. "Their many tracks here?"

"The Long Knives are our enemies," decided No Meat, "so they protect the killer. Young Kansas Devil travels with them. This house is empty. The covered wagon is gone. There are neighbors' tracks here, too—Golden Girl's and her father's. What about their house?"

A wide-ranging scout came in and reported as they talked.

"The house of Golden Girl and her father is empty," was his report.

Another scout who had reconnoitered the Armstrong home rejoined them.

"The woman doctor, Singing Nurse, is gone, too. All the houses are empty."

Wild Elk's command rang out to Shoot So Far, their swiftest, hardiest horseman.

"Ride to White Cap on the Saskatchewan, over the Canada boundary, with this word," he directed. "Tell White Cap to cut off Young Kansas Devil while we follow him up. Between two Sioux bands, the killer will not get over the Medicine Line."

"I go," cried Shoot So Far, mounting his pony. "I tell White Cap. We capture Young Kansas Devil on the Canada Trail."

Shoot So Far vanished like one of his own far bullets, whose speed and long range had earned him his Indian name.

Taking the body of Flame Eye with them, Wild Elk and his men pounded away from Keith's homestead on the combined tracks of the covered wagon and the United States Cavalry that ran straight to the Free People's camp of Captain Paul Hull.

"Now, give them blazes," growled Florida as they passed by wide of the corral.

Anxious guns in their hands, Jim From Georgia, Mississippi Mat, Alabam and Lou-Lou gestured to back him, but Texican Towers restrained them.

"Not yet," Texican ordered. "This changes the program. Keith, Ted, Rider Imp, Ilo and Ruby sure

need our help. We got to drop a lone herder or two to keep an eye on things here. The rest of us 'll heel Wild Elk's bucks to the boundary and spoil White Cap's play when he sits in at the game. When the pinch comes, Keith ought to be danged glad we disobeyed his spoken orders and didn't stay home on the R C A Range."

Texican nodded to aged Bill Leathermouth, the rider of longest experience on the ranch, and to Game Leg Godfrey, whom a fall from an outlaw horse years before had crippled in the knee.

"Figure you can hold it down, Game Leg?" Texican inquired. "You and Old Bill?"

"Shucks, yes," grinned Game Leg. "We won't see no one now on these here three sections to chase four, five, six mile to Hellingawn. Cavalry and Sioux both pulling out Northwest, ain't they?"

Game Leg spoke a little wistfully and rubbed his knee with a pensive hand as if he wished right now that it were whole.

Old Bill appeared a shade disappointed, too, but he laughed it off heartily.

"Of course," he scheduled his own and Game Leg's days ahead, "we kin breakfast at R section, dine at C section, have supper at A-Section and bed down most any place. Never going to peeve us riding herd on three empty bunk houses and a trio of uninhabited homesteads."

"Wonder them Tetons and Yanktons didn't fire the blamed buildings," put in Alabama Andy Cull curiously.

"No time for torch tricks," Texican told him. "What they aim for first is to meet up with Keith somewheres around the border. That's why we better ride right on their tails and give them the surprise of their riotous lives north a ways yonder."

Texican waved a sympathetic hand.

"All's slick and smooth as saddle leather, then, Game Leg and Old Bill," he concluded. "Sorry you can't be in the fun, boys."

"Consarnation!" exploded Game Leg Godfrey. "Some waddies have to stick here."

"And us ancient carrions is picked," added Bill Leathermouth. "Good trailing, pals."

Texican's riders shouted back as they raced from the emptied corral to remount their horses in the wash behind, picked up their old chuck wagon and wheeled out on the Canada Trail.

The Tigers of the Plains

DAKOTA Indians at first, who later became hunters of the plains southward and westward, the Sioux were mostly refugees in Canada.

Uninvited visitors, unwelcome guests, ordered home but not finally or forcibly ejected, they clung to Canada by claim of birthright, British citizenship and old King George medals, proving so far—at least until disturbers like Sitting Bull in the past and now Louis Riel's runners Whispering Cree, Diamond-Thumb Jerome Platte, along with Riel's friends Gabriel Dumont, Nolan, Boyer, Batoche and the rest, swayed them with golden promises—tolerably tractable and industrious farmers on the reserves.

After the 1862 massacre of whites in Minnesota, the tigers of the plains had settled at different points: at Portage la Prairie where their three original Manitoban camps prospered in a decade until they contained three hundred souls with fresh distribution over the Assiniboine territory; at the Turtle Mountains; and in the Qu'Appelle Lakes section of the Saskatchewan.

From the Marsh of Whooping Cranes in Kansas in the Qu'Appelle Lakes country was a long ride, but, traveling with the speed of a courier and faster than Captain Paul Hull's caravan of Free People, the messenger Shoot So Far left the Missouri River behind, crossed the border and headed for White Cap's reserve just east of the Sand Hills and above the Saska-

toon not far from Clark's Crossing on the Saskatchewan River itself.

There, momentous warnings and alarms stirred the Sioux camps as well as the Prince Albert settlement. Outlying bands were coming in to join White Cap in a proposed attack on the town, but where their pathway descended suddenly upon an ominous trail, which transport scouts for the Mounted Police had marked out for quick passage of an emergency force for Prince Albert if necessary, the advance riders stopped. Instantly dubious about crossing it and possibly being taken in the rear, they waited till White Cap's men came up. Fully armed, the Sioux from the Sand Hills were known to have been off the reserves for two or three weeks already and to be off the reserves meant that they were on the trouble trail.

"It is the scouts of the Mounted Police," the van pointed out to White Cap when he rode up. "They mark a big wagon trail toward Prince Albert."

White Cap examined the markings gouged out in the snows of the valley.

"Are they all Police scouts?" he asked.

"Yes, many scouts. Many scouts mean many Red-coat riders will pass afterwards from Regina if they are needed at Prince Albert. What is your word?"

White Cap was cautious as well as wily.

"We shall camp here and hold council about what to do," he decided. "If we are not strong enough, we must get help. The Tetons and the Yanktons can slip off their reserves and sneak across the Canadian border to help us now that the Mounted Police have to turn

their eyes northward and cannot watch the boundary so well as before. We can send for Flame Eye, Wild Elk and all the Sioux chiefs below the Line. But, first, let men speak in council."

The tepees went up by the scouts' trail where it turned and twisted among the snow-embossed Saskatoon bushes like warning handwriting on the icy crust of bloody clashes to come. In White Cap's big tent they sat in a semicircle around the central fire, facing the flap, White Cap in the middle of the curved line, his councillors ranged to right and to left. When all had spoken, the chief summed it up in an address, congratulating them at the same time.

"Our judgment is one," he announced. "We are not strong enough alone. We must send for Flame Eye, Wild Elk and the others. Then we can fall upon Prince Albert. Who is our swiftest messenger to send south for our brother Sioux?"

White Cap raised his eyes as he put the question, and through the open flap he glimpsed a lone horseman riding from the south for Clark's Crossing.

An advance Sioux scout sighted the solitary rider at the same time and made announcement from the outside of the camp.

"Wait," he advised; "a messenger comes here. A rider from south of the Medicine Line."

"It is Shoot So Far, a headman of Flame Eye and of Wild Elk. White Cap identified the newcomer. "Bring him in to the council."

Shoot So Far dismounted without any apparent stiffness and stood before the council, grateful for the

warmth of the tepee fire.

"You come from Flame Eye?" questioned White Cap.

"Flame Eye is dead," Shoot So Far told him. "Young Kansas Devil, Keith Culver, of the R C A Range, killed him by the Marsh of the Whooping Cranes."

"Speak on," commanded White Cap. "Rebellion is starting here. I was going to send for Flame Eye and Wild Elk, but maybe there is no need."

"There is no need," Shoot So Far revealed. "Wild Elk comes with his men."

Shoot So Far told much more, of Golden Girl, Ilo Ross, and her father Ted Ross, of Singing Nurse, Ruby Fleury, and the Oregon Owl, Rider Imp Burt, of Major Wade, Scar Cheek, and Colonel Burt, Goat Beard, with their U. S. Cavalry, of Paul Hull and his Free People—the whole caravan which even now must be approaching the border and which would soon come over the trail to Qu'Appelle.

The only thing he did not know and could not tell was that the R C A boys Florida Fred Waite, Jim From Georgia Orde, Mississippi Mat Salter, Alabama Andy Cull, Louisiana (Lou-Lou) Hackett and Texican Towers were right behind Wild Elk's band of Sioux, pursuing them as hard as they pursued the Free People's caravan.

"Wild Elk is behind them," Shoot So Far concluded. "You are in front. Between your forces you can trap them."

"Yes," agreed White Cap, "we will trap them. But

this Captain Paul Hull and his Red River Freeman, will he fight for his friends?"

"I do not know," ventured Shoot So Far, "but it is well for us to remember what the metis, the Free People, told Sitting Bull when he asked their help in his invasion of Canada."

"I remember," spoke White Cap. "The metis warned Sitting Bull that there would be a dead Blue-coat beside every dead Redcoat on the plains. The Freeman would fight alongside the Mounted Police then. Why not now?"

"It is a thing to remember," repeated Shoot So Far.

"Yes, but all the same we will trap Young Kansas Devil and all his Kansas friends, men and women, we will block their trail. After that with Wild Elk's band, we can fall upon Prince Albert."

CHAPTER 13

Larry Walters, Expert Morse Code Man, Represents Chicago Tribune

THE call-out, of which Keith Culver had spoken to the others the night they left the Ross homestead, was about to sound, not only in the West but in the East and from coast to coast; a call-out which would bring first from Winnipeg—because Winnipeg was nearest—the 90th Winnipeg Rifles and 13th Field Battery into action on the prairie.

From Winnipeg to Calgary and from Calgary to the Rockies it would echo presently in a summons destined for Adjutant Steele policing the Canadian Pacific Railway camps in British Columbia. For Steele the Northwest Mounted bugle soon would blow at Beaver Creek and hurry him back over the mountain section of the new steel to Calgary, where the Winnipeg Light Infantry was slated to join the Mounted and go into bivouac beside the barracks of the Red-coat force.

Far, far eastward, too, spring-showered Toronto stirred to the March tocsin. Snowy Kingston heard. Crusted Ottawa, iced Montreal and floe-jammed Quebec listened. Halifax threw off its winter blankets, opened its harbor and dug out its drift-piled Inter-colonial Railway.

All waited, alert, for a swift call to arms.

Yes, to the Mounted Police, to the metis, to the militia, to the Indians, to the whites, the clarion was going to blare; and with its trumpet notes the call-

out would ring also to the newspapermen who were prepared to give the news of coming troop movements and future battles to an anxious eastern world both north and south of the International Line.

For proprietors of dailies and weeklies and reporters everywhere the telegrapher's key was clicking in advance—for Nick Davin of *The Regina Leader*, for George Ham of *The Winnipeg Free Press*, for John Ross Robertson of *The Toronto Evening Telegram*, for Kennedy of *The Montreal Star*, for Hill of *The Detroit News*, for Joe Medill of *The Chicago Tribune*, for editors and Morse code men of other American centers all the way down to Larry Walters at the Kansas City station.

The day after Larry had sent Keith Culver's wire off and watched Keith and Ilo ride away, young Jim Hewitt, the auburn-haired, kind-eyed, sunny-checked, whistling operator who spelled Larry and learned telegraph lore from him, was at the Kansas City key when Larry's call ticked in from Prince Albert via the Humboldt Telegraph Station, Canada.

"It's for you, Larry," Jim announced smilingly, his boyish features alive with breathless interest and expectation as he pushed over the blank he scribbled with his left hand while the fingertips of his right quivered to the instrument's vibrations.

"AM NOW DESPATCH BEARER TO END
OF TELEGRAPH — WHEREVER THAT
MAY BE—EVERYTHING DEPENDS ON
RIGHTLY SENT MESSAGES—WILL YOU

COME AND HANDLE THEM FROM
HUMBOLDT FOR QU'APPELLE BASE?"

"Signed:—Robert Armstrong,
Northwest Mounted Despatch Carrier
Chief Scout to Major-General Middleton, North-
west Field Force

"Authority:—Major Crozier N. W. M. P., Prince
Albert."

The moment Larry read Bob Armstrong's second message, he shoved his railroad cap back on his almost bald head and laid his long pipe back on the desk a minute. He rapidly rolled down his sleeves, jerked his coat from the wall hook and put it on.

"I had one invitation from Keith Culver and Ilo Ross when the R C A party rode out," he commented. "I figured then it was an adventure ride. But now it's a matter of life and death. People's lives will depend on messages going through—going through properly. I was there the first time, and I know."

Young Jim Hewitt stared, fascinated by a brighter gleam in Larry's merry topaz eyes, a more expansive glitter of gold fillings between his smiling lips.

"You're called Northwest again, Larry?" he burst out, his voice vibratnig like the singing-wires. "You're going?"

Larry grabbed his long pipe.

"I'm called Northwest, Jim, and I'm sure gone. Wire the Superintendent. Emergency duty. Bread and butter doesn't count when it comes to flesh and blood. Superintendent can do what he darn well pleases

about my job and pension."

"Superintendent will save both for you, Larry," asserted Jim. "I know that. But hold on—here's another message for you coming off the key. From Chicago—*The Chicago Tribune*."

Jim scribbled and passed the form, although he knew Larry could hear it as loudly as he could.

"WANT SECOND NORTHWEST REBELLION NEWS REPORTS—LIKE YOUR CIVIL WAR AND YOUR SURE-FIRE FIRST NORTHWEST REBELLION MESSAGES—CAN CONNECT AGAIN WITH JOHN ROSS ROBERTSON AND HIS (PRESENT) TORONTO EVENING TELEGRAM—WIRE IF FREE TO TAKE NEXT CHICAGO TRAIN."

"Signed:—Joe Medill,

"Editor *Chicago Tribune*."

Larry nodded vigorously.

"Send Bob Armstrong the word that I'm off—if it ever gets through to him with Crees and Sioux and half-bloods bound to be cutting the wires up there," he directed. "Wire Joe Medill I'm on the Kansas City Outbound, Jim. There's the Outbound whistling now down the line. Certain you can work alone for a while, youngster?"

"Doggonedly sure, Larry," declared Jim proudly.

"Goodbye, then, son."

"Farewell, Mr. Larry Walters, Northwest Field

Force expert Morse code man," joked the boy, although he felt a big pang and a great responsibility as he watched Larry hop the train for Chicago.

Off the Kansas City Outbound, Larry hurried into the *Chicago Tribune* office and came on alert, sharp-eyed, tousled-haired Joe Medill hunched in his editor's chair, stabbing a giant pen into a ream of paper scrawled with brown ink.

"Hello, Joe," he called. "You got my answer, of course. I have only a few minutes between connections for Toronto."

"Hello, Larry," smiled Joe. "I'm sorry you're so close to train schedule as that. I thought we'd have a talk. But I'll write you a representative's letter off this heap. J. R. R. represented *The Chicago Tribune* last time."

"*Daily Telegraph*, wasn't J. R. R.?" recalled Larry.

"Yes, and accordingly J. R. R. *Evening Telegram* will do the job accurately and impartially again."

Medill flourished some more with the spattering pen and gave Walters the document without blotting.

"Blow on it for luck and dry it out," he laughed. "Let's see how your wind holds out in case the Indians chase you hard in the Northwest."

"Blood's thicker than water," mumbled Larry.

"And ink's thicker than saliva, eh?" enlarged Joe, chuckling till his stomach watch chain made a portly rumbling, at Larry's windy haste to dry it. "I'll hold the train on orders of the press if you're going to miss it."

Larry laughed also, drawing a deep, whistling breath again as he pocketed the script.

"No, you don't have to hold anything, Joe. The ink's set already. I'll catch the train for Toronto all right and fix things up with J. R. R."

"That's fine, then, Larry. I'll be waiting for your first word. If things are starting and there's any movement of interest when you reach Canada, send me the item from Toronto, will you?"

"I sure will, Joe. Funny if there isn't some stirring news material going to waste there at this flying moment. So goodbye, now."

Joe heaved himself suddenly out of his chair and half ran, half shuffled with him as far as the office doorway.

"Goodbye, Larry. *The Chicago Tribune* doted on your Confederate-Yankee fight messages and your Fort Garry accounts of the half-blood trouble before. Send lots like them and stop coming back this way. Then we can talk together a long time."

Larry waved a hand reassuringly as he hurried away with Joe's credentials in his pocket.

"Thirty," he called in final farewell.

*J. R. R. of Toronto Evening Telegram Gets Second
N. W. Rebellion Reports*

OFF the Chicago train in the old Toronto Union Station, Larry jogged up Bay Street through the slush and pouring rain of what they called an early March spring and turned into *The Evening Telegram* office, where a group sheltered from the drizzle hung around the entrance.

He climbed the wooden stairs to his right and dived into J. R. R.'s sanctum.

It was a long time since Larry had seen him, but he realized that the striking, well-known-about-the-street figure of the former *Daily Telegraph* reporter had not changed perceptibly.

J. R. R. had his tall frame and sloped shoulders stuck out of the window in the fashion he employed when announcing the winners of prize fights to crowds gathering in the street below. He was talking to some people now, his somewhat pendulous lip deflected, his genial, flashing eyes smiling, his long nose bobbing and his slicked hair rumpling as he sent his sonorous words out of the open window.

Beside him, somber, scowling, his rugged face like granite hollowed into deep twin caves that shadowed his eyes and bushy eyebrows, leaned a man with a squat figure built like a wrestler's, his shoulders wide, his head belligerent, speaking sparing syllables spaced at long intervals over the sash without apparent lip movement, so that there remained about him the

impression of silence, competence, power.

"Perhaps you don't remember me, J. R. R.," nodded Walters. "It's fifteen years—"

"Larry Walters," howled J. R. R., darting out his hand. "This is John R. Robinson with me."

"How are you, Mr. Robinson," greeted Larry.

"You're Kansas City Walters," John R. Robinson replied. "*Chicago Tribune* wrote about you. Joe Medill's paper."

"Yes, I called on Joe a minute coming through. He sent you some credentials."

Larry took Medill's letter from his pocket and laid it in J. R. R.'s hand.

"That's great," beamed J. R. R. "It brings back old times and *The Daily Telegraph*, when I visited Joe en route through Chicago on my way to report the First Northwest Rebellion. By the way, I met a young Kansas City friend of yours in *The Chicago Tribune* office that day—Keith Culver."

"Yes, Keith talked about your meeting at that time," Larry told him. "Keith will be in the thick of it this trip. Keith went Northwest first of March, when he killed the Sioux chief Flame Eye and had a run-in besides with the United States Cavalry under Major Wade and Colonel Butt."

"Did Keith Culver go alone?" asked John R. Robinson quickly, a gleam of sudden interest lighting his stony face like a sun shaft.

"No, he rode out with his partner Ted Ross, of their combined R C A Range, Ted's daughter Ilo, a cousin Nurse Ruby Fleury, foreman Rider Imp Burt,

foreman Texican Towers and a lot of R C A hands."

"Scouting?" John Ross Robertson inquired.

"Yes, left to scout for the Mounted. Ought to be pretty nearly into Canada now, even though they did have that mix-up with the Sioux and that trouble with the Cavalry. Scout Bob Armstrong wired for them to come. Special Constable, Bob, and if he wasn't American born I guess he'd have the red coat of the Northwest Police on, to. Bob sent for them, and at this stage of the game he sends for an old-time telegrapher like me."

J. R. R. was beaming more happily every moment as he listened.

"That's grand story material," he enthused. "That's the poignant human interest stuff in the big sweep of events which people want to know about. Go ahead, Larry. Tell us some more."

"The situation is a hazardous one for somebody," Walters explained, "according to the lay-out Game Leg Godfrey and Old Bill Leathermouth gave me. Game Leg and Old Bill are the only two R C A men left on the Ross-Culver-Armstrong Range back home. Cavalry after Keith. Sioux after Keith and Cavalry. R C A hands after Keith, Cavalry and Sioux—and, in the front of the run-away, Keith's party teamed up with Captain Paul Hull's Free People camp."

Larry checked off the five outfits involved with deft stabs of his mobile fingers, as if he were clicking the information over his telegrapher's key in the routine of his daily work.

"Only," he stressed the point, "Keith and Ted

Ross don't know the R C A boys are on the prod in the rear."

John R. Robinson inclined his head and shoulders ponderously, catching the significance of Larry's last statement with his usual acumen.

"No means of telling them on the trail north," Robinson deduced quietly.

"Exactly," bubbled J. R. R. "Wonderful grist for the paper mill. This Ilo Ross girl is along, you say. Fleury girl, too. I tell you, Larry, that's real news attraction—romance and everything to boot. We'll have to spread that on the front page, eh, John?"

Robinson made a flourishing gesture of his hand out of the window, his heavy palm brushing the rain like a fan.

"With some sketches, pen sketches, as illustrations," he barked. "Young Jack Beatty's drawings."

Larry Walters stared down into the street and saw a boyish figure in Toronto fireman's attire, along with a few youths in bright military trappings which he recognized as the uniform of the well-known Queen's Own Rifles.

"Is that who you were talking to?" Larry asked Robinson curiously.

"Yes, young Jack Beatty—the Painting Fireman—from the old Yonge Street Hose Tower," Robinson enunciated jerkily. "Bugler in the Queen's Own Rifles, and a good artist, Jack—not forgetting his put-out ability at fires, either."

"We were talking art, you see, Larry," volunteered J. R. R., "over in the back of the Whaley

Royce Music Store—Robinson, Whaley, Owen Staples, Beatty, Beatty's teachers J. W. L. Foster and J. C. Reid of the Central Ontario School of Art and Industrial Design, and I, together with Private G. H. Needler and those other Toronto college boys down below yonder. Needler and the rest are K Company or University Company, of the Queen's Own. They were drilling, and all came along to see what time the Governor-General's Bodyguards—the Horse Guards, you know—were getting away to the Northwest. The Bodyguards are going off tonight. They're loading the cars with the horses now. They'll pull out when all their mounts are loaded."

John Ross Robertson paused and with a characteristic motion scratched his head pensively.

"So," he continued calculatingly, "your friend Keith Culver doesn't know his foreman Texican Towers and the RCA cowboys are trailing the Sioux."

"No, Keith doesn't," Larry lamented.

J. R. R. looked meditatively at John R. Robinson, a sort of telepathic conference going on between them in the silence.

"Maybe Constable Bucking Bart Chester can find a way to let Culver know," suggested J. R. R. finally. "Bucking Bart is good at finding ways."

"Bart Chester's here yet?" asked Larry Walters with a grin as he recalled Keith posting his letter to Bart and remembered Keith's words when he hammered on the mail box, predicting for Bart the thrill of a future romance.

"Oh! yes," coughed John R. Robinson, "Bucking Bart's here yet. He brought in broke horses, and some of his trained Mounted Police horses, too, I believe, for the Governor-General's Bodyguards. Bart's the Mounted's nominee in charge, and he's loading the last of the contingent now."

J. R. R. stared once more at Robinson, and then at Larry Walters.

"I think we'd better skip down to the tracks where they're loading," decided J. R. R.

"I'm sure we had," Larry agreed.

CHAPTER 15

Toronto's Call-Out Sends Her G. G. B. G. and Finest Soldiers West

BETWEEN Jack Beatty and Private Needler, the Kansas City telegrapher, dodged down through the deluge with the others to the railway siding by the old Queen's wharf near the waterfront.

The smell of Lake Ontario, springlike, sedgy, fresh, blew in to Larry's wet nostrils, and on the strong east wind he heard the running swish of the beating shore surf, punctuated by the grinding heave of ice cakes spinning out of the harbor. Even in the gloom he saw their ghostly sheen, driving by Hanlan's Point, and he realized that the Bay which stretched from this margin to Toronto Island was free and that navigation here was open, although Lake Superior and the other Upper Lakes ports remained still bound by heavy fields of floes.

Beatty, the sixteen year old artist-fireman, and Needler, the Varsity rifleman, pelted Larry with questions all the way down, questions that fell like the raindrops, about the first Rebellion of 1869-1870 and the Northwest Territories.

Both Beatty and Needler were bound to be in this second one.

"I want to draw, to paint those scenes, to get a record of it on canvas," Jack kept reiterating while they splashed along.

"You bet," agreed Needler. "Anyway, to me it looks more exciting than the Fenian Raid the Queen's

Own Rifles Varsity boys Bill Mulock and Tempest and McKenzie and Mewburn went on in 1866. And it's a longer march than to Ridgeway." (Privates Tempest, McKenzie and Mewburn were killed at Ridgeway, 1866.)

Beatty chuckled at the comparison in miles for his teacher Reid had found him something of an outstanding student in mathematics as well as in art—put his foot in a waterhole and sent it squirting over the others.

"How long have you been in the Queen's Own Rifles, Needler?" asked Larry.

"Three years," Needler told him. "I enlisted as a first-year student in 1882."

"And you, Beatty?" inquired Larry humorously while he shrewdly estimated the capabilities and possibilities of the eager youth.

"Gee," laughed Beatty, "G. H. is a veteran compared to me. I even think he has a gray hair or two sprouting already. Me, I'm only a bugler in the Queen's Own yet."

John Ross Robertson touched Larry's shoulder, wet by the drizzle that rebounded off the line of railway cars they stumbled along.

"There's the Bodyguards' C. O.," he pointed out. "Yonder. Colonel G. T. Denison."

"And no better Commanding Officer for cavalry," John R. Robinson enlarged:

"And Lieutenant William Hamilton Merritt beside him," J. R. R. added. "Merritt generally leads the scouting parties of the Bodyguards. Hello, Bill, how

do you like the size of the crowd?"

Colonel Denison looked round at the sound of the familiar voice, waved to them and laughed.

"Not enough to make us nervous, anyhow," he remarked, partly to J. R. R., partly to Bill Merritt.

Lieutenant Merritt jocosely began to count heads among the onlookers in the rain.

"Not hard," Bill cackled, ticking them off on the fingers of his gloved hand. "One spectator officer from the Reserve, and a G. G. H. G. trooper's dad—or grandad, I don't know which."

"No, you hardly need the rest of your fingers, Lieutenant," Colonel Denison put in the sly dig at the smiling J. R. R.

"Newspapermen don't count, eh?" cachinnated J. R. R. "How much of an audience did you expect in this weather and at this hour?"

"Yes, consider the circumstances, Colonel," bawled John R. Robinson. "Do you know it's Tuesday morning, an hour past midnight—in fact, one o'clock of the new day of March the 7th?"

"Nevertheless, Colonel," John Ross Robertson forgave him, "we're sending an American newsman or, more properly, a telegrapher along with you—Larry Walters from 'way down at Kansis City."

"How are you, Mr. Walters," cried the Colonel. "We're glad to have you with us."

"Proud, I'm sure, Walters," seconded Lieutenant Bill Merritt. "You see, I've heard of you before, and some of your exploits linger in the memory."

During the general goodbyes and the teasing, Larry

Walters shook J. R. R.'s hand.

"Thanks, J. R. R. Don't let them pull away without me at the last minute. Where's Constable Bart Chester among all these Bodyguards?"

"There's Bart, over there with those troopers, loading the last charger," J. R. R. pointed him out. "Look—in the lantern light, with the red Northwest Mounted Police uniform on. Hi, Bart, here is Larry Walters. You know, Bob Armstrong's picked telegrapher. He's got a job for you and Bill Merritt, right off."

The redcoated Constable Chester turned from loading the last cavalry horse with a nod, and a smile on his bright English face, reached an athletic hand to Walters and hoisted him with the gear bag he carried onto the car beside him.

"Sure glad to shake with a friend a Keith Culver and of Bob Armstrong," he welcomed Larry. "What's the job?"

J. R. R. told it, over the trucks—the predicament of Keith Culver as Larry Walters had revealed it.

"Ladies in the Free People's camp," J. R. R. observed gravely. "Do you know this girl, Ilo Ross, whom Larry's so concerned about?"

"I—I think I do," confessed Bartley Chester hesitatingly. "At least, I ought to know her by correspondence. Honestly, I don't like the look of things for Ilo Ross and all her companions on that trail."

Bucking Bart stared at Lieutenant William Hamilton Merritt in grim consideration for a swift minute before he made up his mind.

While Bart stared, Larry Walters asked John Ross Robertson another question, for he was somewhat curious about the evident friendship between J. R. R. and the Mounted man.

"Did you know Bucking Bart long before, J. R. R.?" he inquired wonderingly.

"Yes, in England; only he wasn't Bucking Bart then. Just plain Bartley, son of Mortimer Chester. Oh, yes, I knew Chester Senior and Lord Sanford quite well when I was in the old country for three years on *The London Express*. You'll like him, all right, Larry.

Bart evidently had made up his mind.

He spoke straight out, still staring at Lieutenant Bill Merritt.

"The Sioux in the Saskatoon country were 'up' when I left Regina, Bill," he reminded Merritt. "I wondered then where White Cap was headed, but now I know. We can't get some of your G. G. H. G. between White Cap and Captain Paul Hull's Freemen any too quick. Do you think Colonel Denison will give you special permission to hunt that Sioux chief down?"

"Of course I shall," Denison assured them, "if you scout Merritt's route march to find White Cap."

Bart gave the Colonel an impetuous salute and clicked his spurs with a resounding ring.

"It's a bargain, Bill," he accepted warmly. "I can find White Cap with my eyes shut. Thanks, Colonel; thanks very much. It's a pretty personal matter with me, you understand. Come on, Walters; you're in this,

too. Stick right with us."

J. R. R. grinned knowingly, a farewell grin for Colonel Denison.

"Romance, you see, Denison," J. R. R. hinted. "Rebellion, hardship, heroism, adventure, danger, death ahead, maybe—but romance never dies through it all."

"That will be a good thing to remember in the snow and cold among the half-bloods and the Indians, J. R. R.," Denison called back, his head poised in proud military manner but his face alight with a parting smile for his friends.

CHAPTER 16

Mulock and Blake Salute Queen's Own Rifles, Private Needler, Bugler Beatty

THE car wheels spun as the troop train moved, slowly at first, and the historic cavalry regiment of Canada pulled out.

Artist-Fireman-Bugler Beatty and Private G. H. Needler took their turn, waving in the rain at Constable Bartley Chester and Telegrapher Larry Walters.

"Our Queen's Own Rifles will not be long after you," predicted Needler.

"No fear about that," asserted Beatty. "We'll see you fellows again, shortly, at Qu'Appelle."

Needler tapped his uniform badge with the figure two showing in the center.

"You know our motto, boys—'In Pace Paratus' (In Peace Prepared)," he yelled.

Bart Chester's throaty English voice, made voluminous and softly drawing by Western spaces, answered him from one of the swaying cars.

"You're talking Latin, Needler," Bart's comment floated rearward jestingly, past the winking tail lamps of the caboose. "I thought J. R. R. said you were studying to be a Professor of German."

Larry and Bart laughed and waved together, now out of hearing of those left on the railway siding in the spring showed which still rattled down.

"What's the two for, Chester?" asked Walters. "I understood Needler was K Company—University Company of the Q. O. R."

"Yes, but the Queen's Own were originally called Volunteer Militia Rifles of Canada, Second Battalion," Bart explained. "Only one infantry unit was gazetted before it, Number One, a Montreal regiment; and they amalgamated Number One finally. So the Q. O. R. is Canada's oldest and finest regiment, affiliated with the Buffs, Royal East Kent Regiment, Third Foot, formed in 1665, with battle honors like Blenheim, Ramilies, Oudenarde in every succeeding British war. Needler's right. The Queen's Own and the other forces won't be very long after us."

Not long! For general headquarters' orders came on a Friday night, only three weeks later, to the Second Battalion Q. O. R. and to the Tenth Royal Grenadiers. The command went out to Lieutenant-Colonel Miller's Rifles and Lieutenant-Colonel Grassett's "Grens" to report for drill shed parade at nine in the morning, and for three hundred picked men, half from each company, with New Fort regulars, C Company Infantry School Corps eighty strong. Colonel Otter picking the Queen's Own which he would lead eventually.

No less proud than C. O. Lieutenant-Colonel Miller's Queen's Own were the "Grens," with C. O. Lieutenant-Colonel Grassett at their head and men of well-known Toronto families officering—Major G. D. Dawson, Captain John Morrow, Lieutenant J. D. Hay, Lieutenant Cecil Gibson, Lieutenant A. M. Irving, Lieutenant W. S. Lowe, Lieutenant O. L. Spence, Lieutenant G. W. Fitch, Captain James Mason, Pellatt, Ryerson, Jarvis, Michie, Gzowski,

Burns, and many more answering the Northwest call.

Uniforms of rifle green and scarlet—marched together in the bright moon of March 30th, bands ahead stepping them out, eleven thousand people cheering them into the Union Station and conniving with two dozen stowaways who were itching to be in the expedition, secret volunteers, bound, like Jack Beatty and Private Needler, not to be excluded from the fight!

Another Tuesday troop train—and still more!

Parkdale bugles blew "Fall In," the Twelfth York Rangers went out—four companies with the Simcoe Foresters, making up the York-Simcoe Battalion—and the Governor General's Foot Guards marched away at the order from the capital, their own especial stamping ground.

Again Private Needler was right.

Not so overly long behind the Bobbyguards—the Horse Guards—at Carleton Junction, Carleton Place, the Queen's Own Rifles turned westward. The last to wave Bugler Jack Beatty, Private Needler and the rest good luck were standing there doing it from the Junction platform—Needler's college chums Bill Mulock and Ed Blake.

Deserting Parliament at Ottawa, Blake was down at the Junction with his friend Mulock long enough just to see if Van Horn, the big C. P. R. man, was making good his boast about quick transportation of the troops to the West, and to bid the Q. O. R. men *bon voyage* as the Q. O. R. men themselves had

tossed farewells after Bart Chester and Larry Walters on the G. G. B. G. train.

For Ed Blake and Bill Mulock had talked in the capital with Sir John A. Macdonald, Van Horn and other officials about the need for speed.

"Do you think you can put the militia there in a hurry, Van Horn?" asked Mulock.

"Yes, in the face of all the known handicaps, missing steel and everything," Ed Blake reminded Van Horn somewhat dubiously.

"With two weeks' notice, I can jerk anything from Ottawa to Qu'Appelle in eleven days," declared Van Horn animatedly.

"Men, guns, equipment, batteries, food—the whole kit?" Mulock worried.

"Everything," nodded Van Horn decidedly. "You ask Colonel Montizambert about the artillery. He's commanding."

"But what about the rail gaps and the accommodation for troops passing over them, and housing as they move along?" persisted Blake. "Those breaks in the route run into a good many miles."

"We'll put the soldiers up in the construction camps along the way," whistled Van Horn cheerily.

"Meals?" ventured Bill Mulock who, truly collegiate, always remembered not to go hungry for long.

"We'll feed them with the work gangs," Van Horn smiled. "An army always travels on its stomach, you know. You boys just take a little run down to Carleton Junction and see for yourselves."

"That's not a bad idea, Bill, first hand observance," decided Ed Blake.

"Just fits in with our brief send-off wishes for Needler and the other Q. O. R. boys," Mulock agreed with the Parliamentarian.

So there on the ballast at the forking of the rails, Blake and Mulock, taking stock for themselves, saw Van Horn's swift schedule humming and Lieutenant-Colonel Montizambert rushing the artillery.

"What time will those heavy guns make over the Lake Superior rocks where they'll have to be unloaded, Montizambert?" inquired Blake in his anxious inspection.

"Good time, making allowance for the terrain," Montizambert told him. "The light field guns did well enough on their way westward."

"Available already, you mean?" asked Bill Mulock quickly. "That's wonderful, so soon, if—"

"Van Horn laid the first two batteries down at Winnipeg just four days after leaving Ottawa," the Lieutenant-Colonel grinned.

"Oh-ho!" exulted Blake. "It sounded like an awful task for Van, but he's keeping his word, then? Van's doing it."

The interrupting voice of Private G. H. Needler rasped at them from the Q. O. R. troop train.

"Doing what?" it demanded. "Getting us there, all stretched out on colonist car seats, sleeping on our rifles and kit bags?"

"So there yo uare, G. H.!"

"Hello, Needler. Who is that little bugler you have

along to wake you up? Oh! yes, Jack Beatty, sketch book and all."

The cheery greeting of Needler's chums echoed through the jangling and puffing of busy switching.

"Hello, you tramps," Needler retorted.

Beatty, too, took rapid revenge, sketching them and the cluttered Junction with deft pencil strokes, Ed Blake in Parliamentary black, Bill Mulock in legal gray.

"Your sartorial finish comes out fine, Ed." Bill Mulock amusedly admired it, staring at Beatty's drawings and teasing his friend. "This looks as if you might be Honorable Edward Blake some day yet."

"And what's you look like yourself, Mulock?" snapped Ed. "A knight, perhaps—Sir William, as a climax to a richly rewarded law career—maybe Chief Justice of the legal courts or something supreme like that, eh?"

They joked away, but the merriment could not last long in the hustle and bustle.

Van Horn was running things from Montreal to the distant Rocky Mountains, and his engineer's whistle blew the jesters aside as the Q. O. R. troop train whisked on for the West.

"Good luck, Jack," cried Mulock gaily. "I'll give you a commission for a portrait in oils when you come back from the wars."

"Beatty hates human figure work," Needler threw him the reminder from the ever widening distance between them. "Jack's wrapped up in landscapes."

"Send us a card, anyway," requested Blake. "You

can make one out of birchbark and paint it like the Cree wigwams out there."

Bugler Beatty flourished assent with his shining trumpet, leaning from the car window.

Private Needler, too, stuck out his head to bellow an afterthought for Bill and Ed.

"*Qu'Appelle Nord-Ouest* (Who Calls North-West)?" he propounded dramatically, mysteriously, with a somber hint of the drama, the mystery of that land ahead.

"There you go again, G. H., talking French when you're supposed to be an expert in German," Mulock censured, unconsciously voicing a humorous comment somewhat similar to Constable Bart Chester's when Bart had pulled out of Toronto on the Bodyguards' train.

"Only the men who go there can answer that," philosophized Ed Blake.

Bill and Ed stood wondering if the Q. O. R. had heard them—stood watching space, for the troop train was gone already.

CHAPTER 17

Constable "Bucking Bart" Chester and the Northwest Trail

TO BART CHESTER, who had passed this way before them on March 7th, the Governor General's Horse Guards' advance train—which another of Van Horn's throttle-pullers was routing equally fast—seemed to possess on great speed.

In Constable Bart's estimation, it appeared to crawl as his feverish fret for haste flung ahead of the laboring locomotive smoking through high, snow-drifted cut banks and sweeps of pine forest along the Ottawa River.

Away from Carleton Place and on to Heron Bay and Port Munro!—was the song he heard in the clattering car wheels.

There, on Lake Superior's North shore, was a generous sample of the rail gaps, for the C. P. R. steel was still missing for forty miles. But Bart was unloading his own personal mount Firestep and the other G. G. B. G. horses before the brakes squealed tight on the over-laden trucks.

As soon as he unloaded, he was off again from Port Munro, and the blue Bodyguards, their wool toques with flying tassels whipping in the winter wind, rode after him across the glassy, frost-booming ice of Jackfish Bay.

Colonel Denison and Lieutenant William Hamilton Merritt and even the soldiers themselves, leaning hard, horse and man, into the boisterous Superior breeze,

marvelled at the wild speed of the redcoated Constable piloting in front, pacing them unflaggingly, relentlessly, in the face of snow squalls and blizzard blast that whitened their cheeks.

They glimpsed him there in the swirl, like a burning phantom, riding a bucking bronco he aptly enough called Firestep, a Western range horse which, like its master, writhed full of hell-fire that defied the bitter cold.

"What ails Constable Bartley Chester," grumbled Colonel Denison, "that he routes the Horse Guards so fast?"

He wiped away the frost rime while he spoke and gazed through iced eyelids to see how Lieutenant Merritt was weathering it.

"I interpret it as a Northwest rendezvous, or tryst, or something sentimental," smiled Merritt bleakly, with a stiff smile that cracked the thin ice film forming on his storm-beaten jaw bones.

"Sentimental?" echoed the Colonel wonderingly. "Now is that slave-driving, horse-wrangling Bucking Bart in any way sentimental?"

"I guess he is," the Lieutenant hazarded.

"Are the Mounted Police sentimental?"

"Full of sentiment," coughed Merritt. "Most sentimental, romantic figures in the West—that is, for the ladies, I'm given to understand."

They turned for further enlightenment to Larry Walters who rode up alongside.

"Riding like that to save his sweetheart," gasped Larry, half frozen on his spare G. G. B. G. charger.

"His postal sweetheart, I mean."

Larry saw soldierly derision in their bleared, partly closed eyes.

"Don't doubt me," he went on rapidly, beating one leg to keep up the circulation. "Because I saw Ilo Ross and Keith Culver post Bart an apparently damaging letter down in Kansas City, first of the month."

"Oh! That's why Bucking Bart is so determined to get there," commented Denison. "But still, you'd imagine, perhaps, that Captain Paul Hull's Freemen would be able to take good care of their fellow travelers from the Ross-Culver-Armstrong Range across the Canadian boundary."

Walters snorted at the far-fetched supposition—a freezing, sneezing snort.

"If you'd seen as many Sioux as I have, Colonel, you'd understand," he observed. "Add United States Sioux to Canadian Sioux and see what you get for a sum in arithmetic."

"Couldn't the U. S. Calvary turn Wild Elk's band back on the reserves?" speculated Merritt.

"Not till they've finished their business at the border," Larry pointed out. "I got wind over the wires that Major Wade's and Colonel Butt's troopers were on a special mission."

Colonel Denison nodded with apparent satisfaction to Lieutenant Bill Merritt.

"That explains a debatable circumstance," he remarked. "And of course, Walters wouldn't want to talk about the Cavalry's secret mission here."

"No, I couldn't disclose any information about

official telegrams I handled," stated Larry. "Against the regulations. It would be worth my job and there'd be a penalty fine of a whole year's pay, maybe. Only a word to the wise,—you officers have your own ideas."

The Colonel nodded again, emphatically, and the Lieutenant nodded with him.

"Yes, we have," they admitted in unison.

"So Bart goes fast," sighed Walters. "But I can't blame him under the conditions. Besides, Ilo's a cousin of Keith Culver, Bart's very best friend, barring, perhaps, Bob Armstrong."

Denison and Merritt shook up their chargers, pressing on for the farther shore of Jackfish Bay.

"Well," chuckled Denison, "if Van Horn shoos the Queen's Own, the Royal Grenadiers and the rest along as quickly as Bucking Bart does the Horse Guards, it will be something of a record."

"Van Horn will do it, you bet," vowed Walters. "I know how he manipulates. I saw him move Civil War troops on the Chicago and Alton Railway in the United States. You watch Van's smoke. See him steam up the grade. Van will do that very same magician's trick in Canada."

"A sort of sleight-of-hand performer, eh,—when it comes to organization on the frontier and wilderness transportation problems," commented Lieutenant Merritt. "I heard he made quite a name for himself in railway circles in the United States."

"He did, on the Michigan Central before he changed to the Chicago and Alton," confirmed Larry.

"I've wired more than one tall story of miracles he managed to produce there."

"So we can look forward to him doing just as big things on the C. P. R.," predicted the Colonel. "You realize it's a mighty lucky thing for this country that the steel is built, or nearly built, across the North shore and the prairie lands to the westward. Remember how it was the last time a contingent of troops passed through here—Colonel Wolseley's men to put down Louis Riel's first Rebellion at Fort Gerry?"

Their minds wheeled back fifteen years at a jump, like their nervous horses when they were startled often in icy mid-stride by snowslides from the high ridges above the jutting headlands of rock. Through the mysterious, somber gloom of the black, crowding Algoma forest the uniforms of Wolseley's army seemed to shift with every gale of wind and slant of squall. From March to August, from spring to fall, those old Soldiers of the Queen had endured the long march—forerunners of the trails—by Great Lakes steamers to Dawson's Landing on Superior, over the Dawson Road on foot and with teams, up the roaring river chain and the connecting mesh of interior lakes, ascending the Kaministiquia, surmounting the falls of the Mattawin, crossing the Height of Land to the Winnipeg on the other side, fighting white rapids, wild currents, and long, rough portages every wilderness foot of the way in Ottawa River pointers and other canoemen-piloted boats.

That was the route of the voyageurs, the pathway of the fur traders.

This was the-highway of steel.

Low as was the temperature, blizzard-like the wind, snow-bound the detours, now their own crossing, according to Van Horn's schedule, called for only a traverse of eleven days.

The Royal Grenadiers in the Camps of Desolation

ON BEHIND the Mounted scout the Bodyguards swung, till they could entrain again—on across the Dog Lake gap, through Camp Desolation and all the other construction camps to Port Arthur, away once more on wheels to Winnipeg and Qu'Appelle Base, a couple of stations east of Regina.

And still the Queen's Own Rifles were marching hard only three weeks or so behind them, traversing the same rail breaks which the Bodyguards had so speedily pioneered, bundling into sleighs provided over the Dog Lake gap, descending, cold-stiffened, cramped, at Camp Desolation, to speed their sleighs back for the Grenadiers. Meanwhile the Grenadiers, sick of waiting, footed it through snow, wind, cold, darkness, to meet the hoar-white teams plunging out of vague, black forest alleys so narrow that men had to stand aside knee-deep in drifts before they could manage to climb into the welcome vehicles.

Eagerly Colonel Denison with the G. G. B. G., Lieutenant-Colonel Miller of the Queen's Own and Lieutenant-Colonel Grasset of the "Grens" watched, and noted with pride the progress of the men they commanded in the face of stubborn difficulties, glad to see them perform like seasoned troops and give the lie to little whispers they had heard among the cheering thousands who had seen them off from the Union Station in Toronto.

"Didn't we overhear somebody say something

about green militia, or remarks to that effect back home, Miller?" smiled Grassett.

"Yes. I believe we did," Miller laughed. "Untried troops, was one opinion which sounded to me like a veiled criticism. Maybe they are, but they'll soon be tried—in fact, they're being tried already—and before the end comes, I know they'll not be found wanting in any way."

"Unfit for service, was another hint that was very kindly dropped," Grassett continued.

"They're getting fit fast," Miller pointed out cheerfully. "They'll be like veterans at the end of the campaign."

Night lay on wintry Superior as the artillery, leading the first advance units of the infantry, started over from West End of the brand-new C. P. R. steel. It was a bitter night of the worst month's final storm days excepting one, heading into the blow of March 30th, and the other units from Toronto and the various cities were scheduled to follow as closely as Van Horn thought humanly, or perhaps superhumanly, possible.

Between West End and Red Rock (Nepigon); they bridged a forty-mile gap. Wondering how often these gaps would occur, the Q. O. R. boys began to count. Private Needler and Bugler Beatty taking the tally.

"Sixteen rail gaps, they say," Beatty figured on his sketch book. "Sixteen times out of those confounded sleighs, and sixteen times in, makes thirty-two jumps."

"How far is Port Arthur from Red Rock?" asked

Needler plaintively.

"Sixty-six miles," the accurate artist estimated with a cheerful grin. "We're just begun the march, you might as well know."

From West End to Magpie Camp stretched thirty long miles, and they could measure it by the time it took Colonel Montizambert and the guns to cross.

"Seventeen hours," Beatty reported. "Artillery. That shows what the going is like."

Yet there lurked, beyond, twenty-three more miles, some of them with the sweating horses, some on the lonely marches, till they heard once more the music-sweet rumble of railway trucks, every flat wheel sending up its resounding thud.

"Flat wheels," Jack Beatty interpreted. "Flat cars, too. Sides boarded up a bit against the wind. You can rest your legs a while now, G. H."

"Good Heavens," groaned Needler. "How far do we ride now, Jack?"

"An eighty-mile ride," Beatty announced carelessly, as if it were only a parade round a few city blocks.

Needler groaned louder.

"I'm walking," he protested. "I can keep warmer moving on this condemned grade than sitting still, and liable any minute to be turned into a pillar of ice. You had better keep jogging, too."

"No, climb in," vetoed Beatty, pushing him up ahead. "It's quicker, at any rate."

Huddling on the flat cars, they rode the eighty miles, with the snow-embossed branches of the pines

avalanching down over them from the lofty Laurentian ridges and the thermometer fifty degrees below zero in the open runs.

Cold! Beatty knew it was cold, for he had to poke a hole in the tip of his mitten to slip his sketching pencil through, while he reveled in those vivid North Shore scenes he toiled beside—snow-plastered rock cuts, ice-enameled evergreens, work trains, bohunk gangs, construction shanties, bosses' cabins, engineers' tents, the splendid panorama of a fresh and alluring Northwest, magnetic to his artist's youthful eye.

Cold! Needler also understood how cold it really was. For he tried his University-accented foreign languages on the foreigners in camp and bunkhouse, on grade and ballast cars, accosting the navvies from different European lands in German or French or Latin or other combinations which seemed to suit. When Greek and Italian, Swede and Pole laughed at his attempted switches of conversation with them, jabbering back words he could not understand, and he bared his hands to help out with sign-talk, he felt his fingers tingle in the low temperature till he promptly gloved them again. Then, as he spat his disgust at his own failure in the rôle of universal linguist, he saw the flying spittle freeze in mid-air with a crackling sound before it hit the crust.

Yet, one by one, they were putting the stops behind—Heron Bay, Port Munro, McKellar's Bay, Jackfish, Isbister, McKay's Harbor!

March was out. The new and milder month blew in with its blustery gales, and evening of its third

day (April 3rd) found them at Red Rock looking toward Port Arthur.

"Four nights in a row," yawned Needler, stumbling like an exhausted man. "Four nights, and not a blessed wink of sleep."

"Don't complain," Bugler Beatty cheered him and his companions. "It was Van Horn's meals at the construction camps all along the way that saved our precious lives. He didn't stint them, did he?"

Needler and his tired Q. O. R. comrades, with the "Grens," sniffed the savory odors of a nearby cook-house once again and made for it without hesitation.

"Meals—you're right," murmured G. H. "Hot coffee by the gallon. Did you ever taste such coffee as they serve out to keep us going? Let's push in and get some more."

Fresh out of the frost, they shoved open the cook-house door on an atmosphere full of steam, pastry and meat cooking odors, spicy and delectable, and the fragrance of boiling coffee with its Southern perfume floating out over Northern snows.

"Land's sakes," gulped Needler. "That's plantation brew, all right. Meat—roast beef—potatoes, cakes, syrup, and a whole lot of luxuries. We must be getting out of the woods at last. How long will it take from Port Arthur to Winnipeg now, Beatty?"

"Twenty-four hours," Beatty figured, "and smooth riding, I'm informed, compared to bobsleighs over corduroy and pitchholes in the drifts. But you'd better stoke up good and full and as hot as you can swallow."

"Why?" gurgled G. H., his mouth full of fried potatoes and juicy steak with crisp, browned onions decorating it like a sauce.

"Because you won't stumble on a chance like this or another cookhouse," Jack warned him. "We'll stretch our legs on a flag station platform or two, but restaurants are starvation scarce at the place called Rat Portage."

Meeting Place of Men in Qu'Appelle Valley

FAR on ahead of them now, similar generous meals and plenty of hot coffee spurred Constable Bart Chester and the Bodyguards under Colonel Denison and Lieutenant Merritt, riding through identical marrow-piercing cold.

Larry Walters, trailing Bart's horse Firestep with dogged persistence in spite of the bronco's speed and amazing endurance, breathed easier, however, when they entrained again, and he began to welcome the rail breaks and the gaps in the grade.

Uncompleted roadbed meant the labor of alternately unloading and loading the mounts, but if he lost ground in his pursuit of the flying Constable, he could always make it up again when the stops came where the flats were waiting for them.

Unheated and open, except for low side boarding to keep the troops from falling out, the flats did not entice him with any degree of warmth, but it was on the ground, like Beatty and Needler of the Q. O. R. away back yonder somewhere, that Walters really knew how cold it was on the Northwest Trail.

Cold! Larry soon found out how cold it was, for as he touched the low-hanging telegraph line, sagging from the slanted cross-arms of storm-bent poles in many places, his inquisitive fingers stuck to the frosty strands of wire.

"That's really frigid," he breathed, his breath puffing smokily, while he listened, shivering, to the

weird singing of his loved wires.

"Yes, a little nippy," admitted Constable Chester, "but nothing unusual. Wasn't it cold in Kansas? Keith Culver used to talk, when we were hunting, about some pretty stiff winters you had down there."

"It was spring in Kansas when Keith left, an early spring," Larry recalled pleasantly. "Wildfowl on the wing. I don't see any here yet."

"You will presently," Bucking Bart promised. "That's why we want to make time in the westward push when all the militia units arrive at Qu'Appelle Base, before the trails break and the river ice goes out."

Accordingly they made time, up in the front, and when Lieutenant-Colonel Miller's Q. O. R. and Lieutenant-Colonel Grassett's "Grens" reached the base on April 9th, the fresh arrivals found that the Constable was not there waiting for them.

Larry Walters was not in sight either as the gathering infantrymen continued to disembark for the last time from the now smoothly running troop trains and to swell the tented encampment at Qu'Appelle. In the military assembly Bugler Beatty and Private Needler realized as they pulled in that here was the spot where East met West. When Jack and G. H. had yelled after the G. G. B. G. train, departing from its siding near the Queen's wharf that rain-drenched night of March 7th in Toronto, which now seemed so far away although it was only a little over a month ago, shouting that they would see Constable Bart Chester and Telegrapher Larry Walters again at

Qu'Appelle, they fully expected to find them on stepping down.

For Qu'Appelle had been a meeting place of men since the earliest fur traders and the roaming Cree and Sioux tribes before them, and this was beyond doubt the biggest powwow the lovely poplar-fringed Valley, with its long river winding through from a distant hill-source near the Elbow of the South Saskatchewan—rebellious White Cap's country—had ever seen in summer or winter.

The Q. O. R. section with Beatty and Needler smoked up the grade on the rim and stopped on the siding beside the wooded stretch. Eighteen miles to the northward stood the old, original Hudson's Bay Company fur post, Fort Qu'Appelle, with the later Mounted Police post. In that spacious pull-out between siding and fort and around the newer frontier town which had sprung up at the tracks with the coming of the prairie steel, there was an abundance of room for military manoeuvres, getting into marching order, arranging the artillery movements and the gathering of the transport wagons to accompany the troops. As the Q. O. R. formed up on the ballast, marched into the orderly camp ground and fell out, Jack and G. H. swiftly made a circuit of the pitched tents and looked around in vain for their pair of friends.

Colonel Boulton, who had charge of the scouts, had come over to meet the troops and to place his men at their disposal, and to Boulton they went for information about Bucking Bart and Larry.

"Whereabouts do you suppose they are now, Colonel Boulton?" asked Beatty.

"Constable Chester and Walters the telegrapher must be away across the Qu'Appelle Valley by this," Boulton told them. "Probably somewhere near the Vermilion Hills or farther south toward the Cactus Hills, not so far from the Elbow of the Saskatchewan River. Bart's Double C Ranch runs off that direction, outside Regina, and their route goes ranchward. Bart and Walters went over the Qu'Appelle trail scouting with Lieutenant Merritt's section of the Governor General's Bodyguards three weeks ago."

The way Buckingham Bart had gone, the troops would go, for now they had to leave the steel behind them in a three-pronged drive from Regina, from Swift Current, and from Calgary northwestward across the Saskatchewan River into the rebel country.

From their Calgary base, where the Sixty-Fifth Montreal Rifles under command of Lieutenant-Colonel J. A. Ouimet went on, one force, the Edmonton column, would march to threatened Edmonton.

Another column, the Battleford column, of Miller's Queen's Own Rifles under Colonel Otter, proposed to leave Swift Current and cross two hundred wilderness miles in haste to relieve Battleford, which was surrounded by hostile tribes.

The third and main force, the Batoche column of General Middleton, including the Grenadiers, prepared to strike at Riel's headquarters of Batoche itself.

A Sandhurst man, mustached, brown-faced, deter-

mined, bearing the marks of the New Zealand Maori wars, of the Santhal Rebellion and of the Indian Mutiny upon his rugged features, General Middleton sat a big gray cavalry horse that he rode into the base. He proceeded to hold immediate and preliminary council with the various officers and with Colonel Boulton, at the head of the scouts who would attempt to penetrate Louis Riel's lines and, when direct attack finally came, cut off and capture the insurgent leader himself.

"Remember the word is to bring Louis Riel in alive," Middleton warned Boulton's scouts. "The order is to try not to injure him. The authorities have promised him a fair trial. Of course, we're not near the rebel positions yet, but when we get there at last, it will be well to keep in mind that if he surrenders without a last-ditch fight, so much the better for him."

The Boulton scouts, recalling Colonel Boulton's imprisonment by Louis at Fort Garry during the first Rebellion, and the death of Tom Scott before the metis firing squad, doubted among themselves that Riel would come in alive even if his stronghold was reached in the end and his forces dispersed across country.

"Riel himself deserves to be shot on sight," grumbled Colonel Boulton.

His scouts took it for an omen, while they listened respectfully to General Middleton's outline of the marching days ahead.

"We can depend on the Edmonton column to get

there and help hold off the Crees under Big Bear and the other chiefs while the main column goes on to join Major-General Strange in bringing aid to Fort Pitt," the General sketched his prospective maneuvers. "Major-General Strange will handle the Fort Pitt relief, with Steele's Scouts, Major Hatton's cavalry corps and Captain Jack Stewart's Rocky Mountain Rangers to patrol the base lines and guard despatch routes. Inspector Perry of the Mounted is supporting Strange with a second Police column and artillery that Superintendent Cotton is sending from Fort Macleod. That's the plan of campaign, gentlemen. So establish the main base of Qu'Appelle firmly to carry it out."

CHAPTER 20

Home Guards on the Double C Ranch

QU'APPELLE, Who Calls, was a meeting place of many trails: trails in and out of Winnipeg; border trails up from the Missouri River, the Souris River and other main water routes; the Big Pheasant Plain Trail north to the Police post on Swan River; the thirty-mile Qu'Appelle Valley Trail winding through the basin and climbing the benchland across the Manitoban line to Fort Ellice; the North Trail that led out of the Valley through a coulee and away by the Little Touchwood Hills and the Big Touchwood Hills to Fort Carlton.

Whirling the snow of the Valley Trail behind him, Constable Bart Chester tore up-river toward the limits of the Double C Ranch. Larry Walters trailed Firestep as near as he could get, and Lieutenant Merritt's troop of Governor General's Horse Guards kicked up a flaky spray like smoke as they dug in their spurs to stick with this bucking cyclone of a Redcoat who genuinely rode as if he were going home.

Even while he crossed the neighboring homestead of George Moffatt's ranch, Bart sensed something wrong, for Moffatt's hands were riding line with rifles resting handy on their saddles.

Since Regina Barracks were so convenient now and the Main Line steel of the C. P. R. so close, not many people had bothered carrying firearms these last three years in the West. Their shooting irons were either

lost or rusted, and even George Moffatt's riders and the Double C cowboys had lapsed from the faithful possession of six-guns as the salvation of their leathery skins.

Slowing Firestep, Bart pulled up, waving at his neighbor and the string of riders.

"Hello, George—hello, boys!"

"Hello, Bart," called Moffatt. "How'd you manage with the G. G. B. G. horses? Get them all delivered safe and sound and salted?"

"There—and back," grinned Bart, pointing at the scouting troop. "Bill Merritt's boys. What's the matter here with you, George?"

"Sioux—White Cap—band heading somewhere off the elbow of the Saskatchewan. They daren't come Regina way nor attack Fort Qu'Appelle, with a couple of thousand troops commencing to pile into Qu'Appelle Town below. You're a Mounted man yourself, Bart. What's in the minds of the wily Sioux?"

"Keith Culver's R C A bunch from Kansas," Bart answered him. "Scouts, ladies, Freeman, U. S. Cavalry, U. S. Sioux, R C A rough riders."

He mentioned, in explanation, the killing of White Cap's relative, Flame Eye, down at the Marsh of Whooping Cranes, and Wild Elk's plan for revenge.

"Larry Walters says they left the first of March," he continued. "They ought to have crossed the border in three weeks and more. No word from the Police post at Wood Mountain of R C A coming in over the boundary?"

"Haven't heard a thing, Bart," replied Moffatt, shaking his head doubtfully. "They have their hands full at Wood Mountain anyway, with all the refugees. Panic's got this far, you see."

Bart nodded understandingly.

"This is Larry Walters himself, George, chief despatcher for Bob Armstrong's scouts and for the newsmen," he briefly introduced the telegrapher.

"How do, Moffatt," saluted Larry. "You will be hearing something presently."

"That's good news, Walters," Moffatt greeted him with a smile of real geniality.

"Just as soon as I can get the silent key going—I understand somebody dismantled it at the Humboldt Telegraph Station—and a few of those cut wires spliced up again," Walters grinned. "Those danged Sioux are great metallurgists. They were just like that down on the Arkansas."

"So are the metis," George Moffatt laughed, "and you can't tell which is which. Anyhow, we're jumping glad to welcome you from the Southwest and can promise you a lively time in Canada."

"Thanks, Moffatt, I'm sure glad to be here again. I worked in the first Rebellion, you understand. So it seems like old times for me to be riding these trails again."

"Friend of Keith Culver, eh?"

"Yes, and of Bob Armstrong, Ted Ross, Ilo Ross, Ruby Fleury—in fact, the whole R C A outfit."

"Keith's certainly no stranger here," Moffatt told him. "And we'll positively make the others feel at

home when they blow in, which can't be too soon, in my opinion—before Flame Eye joins forces with our unreliable friend White Cap."

Moffatt turned to include the G. G. B. G. in his welcome as they came up.

"Bill, this is friend Moffatt," Bart introduced the Lieutenant swiftly.

"How are you, Lieutenant?" cried Moffatt. "As I was just saying to Walters, if you fellows would like to camp here or stay a while—"

"You're awfully kind, Mr. Moffatt," Lieutenant Merritt thanked him, "but we'll not be stopping till Bart comes to the forks of his scouting trail."

"If I can lend you any scouting help—" began George Moffatt impetuously.

"You can watch the Sand Hills Trail, George, while I get Dad Chester to look after the Squirrel Hills trail," Bart accepted instantly. "Then I'll get a chance to head off White Cap over the Thunder Creek Trail. See? Once we have those three paths covered, I'll turn back on the Willow Bunch Trail from Wood Mountain to meet the R C A party and stop Wild Elk. Come on, everybody, and we'll ride by the Double C."

They rode down on the Chester Ranch with its long ranch house, bunk house, barns and corrals looming up by the edge of the plain bordering the Qu'Appelle's southern benchlands on ground which three years before had been the uncompleted end-of-steel and bare plateau, and as they passed the water-holes, all pooled and slushed where the cattle and

horses drank and had stamped the snow into dirty ice, Bart saw at a glance that his home place, the C C, was alert also.

There Mortimer Chester had his men on guard, all armed and riding patrol.

"Hello, son," Chester Senior yelled. "You're home in time. And it's a good thing you have the G. G. B. G. with you. Cavalry is what we need right here."

"Of course, Dad, just the thing. Moffatt says the Sioux need quieting. George is holding the Sand Hills road. You take care of Squirrel Hills, and I'll be able to show them the right about in a thundering hurry. This is how things stand."

Bart explained all over again, tersely, about the border party, introducing Lieutenant Merritt a second time along with Larry Walters.

"All right, Bart," Chester Senior agreed instantly. "Go ahead, son. I'll guarantee the Squirrel Hills path for you and the Lieutenant. Good luck, Merritt; I hope you capture White Cap."

Bart whirled Firestep away, scouting in advance of the Bodyguards.

At the Sand and Squirrel junctions of the trail, he left George Moffatt and Mortimer Chester, respectively, with their men.

"If I can sight the R C A when I cut back, I'll give you and George the sign, Dad," he called to them from the distance.

"All right, but make it as fast as you can, Bart," urged Moffatt uneasily.

"Yes, in this land of plundered homes, burned

barns, wrecked corrals and butchered stock, it doesn't do to be off your range too long," declared his father.

They held their positions with a strict accuracy born of their knowledge of these trails and hills, waiting for Bart's signal, while Merritt's horsemen followed the now vanishing, now reappearing Firestep, in all his twists and turns.

Border Ambush for the R C A Range People

FROM his camp in the Dirt Hills, where he had shifted, first from the Eyebrow Hills and then from the Outlook Hills, White Cap watched the plain both ways with Shoot So Far.

Shoot So Far was pointing southward at a long string of carts and wagons coming out of the Poplar River Valley onto the Willow Bunch Trail which ran to Moose Mountain.

"It is the Free People," Shoot So Far grunted, "the band of Captain Paul Hull."

"Young Kansas Devil, Rider Imp, Golden Girl and her father, and Singing Nurse—all the R C A people you talk of—are they with Captain Paul Hull's band of Freeman?" asked White Cap.

"Yes," answered Shoot So Far, indicating the American riders and the covered wagon.

"Are the Long Knives (the United States Cavalry) with them?" the Sioux chief demanded.

"Yes, right behind the Free People and the R C A," Shoot So Far reported. "The soldiers have some wagons, too, with those noisy guns that shoot so fast in them—those guns with a turning wheel, those guns—I forget the name."

"Gatlings?" barked White Cap.

"Yes, Gatlings—that is the name I cannot remember," Shoot So Far cried. "They kill men right and left and in front."

White Cap considered this contingency gravely,

digesting the ominous discovery.

"I heard from the Sioux on the Assiniboine that the Canadian soldiers were getting them," he revealed finally. "That officer Howard is bringing them in. Howard is a very great soldier, a friend of Colonel Boulton who fought Louis Riel at Fort Garry last time. Gatling Gun Howard, they call him. 'Gat' Howard, they say often. The Assiniboines tell, too, that Howard and Boulton have vowed to kill Louis Riel on sight, like a coyote, for the Fort Garry murder of the man named Scott, last time. So now, this time, we are thrown away."

Shoot So Far seemed to think so also, brooding over the plain at the unwelcome guns in the distance, guns that he knew made two men the match of many men, for he had seen them in action, with one soldier feeding the ammunition, the other soldier doing the deadly firing.

"Wild Elk is too late," White Cap declaimed. "Do you see him anywhere, trailing the R C A and the Long Knives?"

"No," reported Shoot So Far, "I do not see Wild Elk or anyone else."

However, still watching the plain both ways, White Cap saw someone else, and he grunted loudly in utter disgust.

Out of the corner of his eye, he detected very quickly the flash of a red coat riding the hill trail from the eastward, the blur of Canadian Cavalry uniforms behind the red coat, and two Home Guard groups of ranchmen off to right and to left, blocking

the hill exits.

Shoot So Far instinctively followed White Cap's surprised glance and squinted hard at the fresh riders spreading over the snow trails.

"Who is that Constable?" demanded Shoot So Far in his sharp tone.

"It is Constable Chester," answered White Cap, making an easy, instant identification.

"You know him well?" commented, rather than inquired, Shoot So Far.

"Yes, I know him very well. He is a bronco-breaking Policeman."

"How do you know him so well at that long distance?" persisted Shoot So Far, slightly puzzled still at the swiftness of White Cap's recognition.

"I know him by the fiery horse he rides, leaping like the flames of a campfire in the wind. I know him because he has been to our Sioux camps often to buy horses for the Redcoat Force. I know him because the hunting trails we ride cross his, and his father's ranch, the Double C. It is a very great ranch for horses, because Constable Chester brings many from the Calgary country, from Captain Jack Stewart's Ranch at Calgary, from Major Strange's Ranch at Calgary, right next the Blackfeet Reserve, and from a horse farm those Mounted Police are trying to make outside of Calgary. Constable Chester breaks and trains the horses on the Double C, and he buys good ones from the Indian camps and sometimes in the Long Knives' country (the U. S. A.)."

White Cap turned to others of the Sioux chiefs

who had left their reserves to join the ranks of the recalcitrants and had taken part in a war council at the elbow of the Saskatchewan's South branch—a council organized by two of Riel's runners (messengers), Diamond-Thumb Jerome Platte and a half-blood Whispering Cree, from the American side of the border.

"Ask the others if I have not seen right," White Cap challenged. "There is Standing Buffalo from Jumping Deer Creek. Standing Buffalo knows Constable Chester very well. Ask him."

The chief of the Jumping Deer Creek Reserve answered immediately without being interrogated.

"It is Constable Chester," Standing Buffalo confirmed. "Although his friends give him another name. It is Bucking Bart Chester."

Shoot So Far cast a rapid, speculative glance at the Sioux encampment behind them in the circle of the Hills and at the run-off stock, both horses and cattle, from the homesteads they had plundered along both banks of the South branch. Corraled by the teeping, the stolen stock was massed in a ponderous herd destined for a drive over the border as soon as they had made their planned junction with Wild Elk.

"Is there any Double C brand in your herd, White Cap?" he asked calculatingly.

"No, there is none of the Double C," rejoiced White Cap with genuine devoutness. "We did not dare—yet. It is a good thing we did not try so soon."

White Cap pointed meaningly to the armed Home

Guards from the ranches watching the forking of the alternative trails.

"One of those Home Guard leaders is Constable Chester's father, his partner on the Double C," the Sioux chief brooded. "The father has a name that turns around. Standing Buffalo knows what it is. Ask Standing Buffalo again."

"It is a name of some old English chief—Mortimer—Mortimer Chester," Standing Buffalo recalled. "Although his friends give him another name, too—Chester Senior. I do not know what it means."

Shoot So Far was estimating, to the extent to which it was possible, the strength of the Home Guard riders.

"And the other leader of those riders?" Shoot So Far questioned.

"It is the homesteader, Moffatt," White Cap told him. "Moffatt, next to the Double C. Then there are soldiers behind the Constable. It is no lie we heard about the troops coming. See, the troops are here. Now we are indeed thrown away. If we are not back in our home camps on the Saskatoon before they march on and search them, they will arrest us. Maybe they will arrest us anyway, even if they do not see us with the ranchers' horses and cattle."

"They have not seen the herds yet," Shoot So Far temporized. "The Hills are a shield. If they do see, you will have to break camp quickly and get away through the Côteau. The soldiers are on the plains side and the prairie is too open."

"It would be better to break camp and run the

stock off through the Coteau before they sight it at all," White Cap counselled. "Still, there is danger both ways, and there is the chance that they might pass the Hills without finding our trail. There is the chance, too, that Wild Elk may come yet, although he seems too late. Wild Elk would wait till the last rider crossed, to close the border trail. Let us wait, also, a little longer."

The Chase into the Coteau Du Missouri

WHILE White Cap waited anxiously, measuring the rapid advance of Constable Chester and Lieutenant Merritt's force of Governor General's Bodyguards following him at some distance, and watching hopefully for Wild Elk's appearance out of the Poplar River Valley onto the high benchland and the trail above, where Big Muddy Creek flowed aslant toward the American border, Shoot So Far kept prodding him with continual questions that did not soothe his uneasy state of mind.

"Those cattle, those brands—" Shoot So Far jabbered at him—"is there any Moffatt brand in the herd you have rounded up in these Dirt Hills?"

"No, there is no Moffatt brand," declared White Cap thankfully. "That is another lucky thing for us. When there is nothing missing yet from the Double C and the Moffatt, they will not be so keen to look for cattle and horses."

"Would they get any word about the brands you have in your herd?" Shoot So Far demanded with his disturbing bluntness. "Would they know that other brands were run off?"

"They might hear some were missing, but I do not think they would know what ones. Most of the ranchers are not near the government telegraph line, and in places we have cut those talking wires so that there is no more quick talk."

Shoot So Far took careful note of the disposition

of the Home Guards, figuring out the strategic posts the ranch hands were taking up and the position of the trails they commanded. Besides Chester Senior and the homesteader Moffatt, he spotted another horseman, accompanying the two groups, who did not look like a line rider. As well as differing from the cowboys in costume and in carriage, this third leading equestrian displayed other sharp contrasts to Shoot So Far's penetrating eyes. Somehow he advertised himself as alien to this especial district, although he rode without fault in the manner of one to whom the route was not altogether strange.

In addition to the evident fact that he was reacquainting himself to an old trail, there was something vaguely familiar about the stranger, and Shoot So Far puzzled over the old impression. Not only a traveler from some other territory—possibly from south of the boundary—was the third man in the forefront, but somebody the Sioux messenger had known in another location. Also, Shoot So Far detected the fact that the traveler rode a cavalry horse, a mount similarly equipped to the chargers of the soldiers.

Suddenly Shoot So Far knew.

He had a vision of burning cattle guards and an angry station agent down in Kansas.

"It is the operator from Kansas City," he announced to White Cap, who watched fixedly, too, to see what had taken Shoot So Far's attention at the moment. "It is the man called Larry Walters."

A coppery glint that was White Cap's substitute for a smile lighted his intent face. His long-distance

powers of identification had not failed him either, although apparently it had been a stiff test.

"I was trying to remember," White Cap intimated, "and now I do remember. You are right, Shoot So Far. It is the man who sends words on those talking wires we were speaking of. The Key Man, they called him, the man who worked the Iron Hand That Taps. He was here last time, although the wires of big magic did not go far from the border then."

"He will make quick talk again," prophesied Shoot So Far. "He will mend those wires you cut. I have seen him fix broken wires."

Shoot So Far's prediction was not a pleasant prospect for White Cap. The coming of Larry Walters with Constable Chester complicated matters for him and made safe retreat less certain. White Cap understood that Larry's arrival was not mere coincidence. The wily Sioux chief knew that the Key Man had been brought into the Northwest because he was familiar with the country; brought in with the avowed purpose of sticking where less experienced or more youthful operators had been driven out by the rebellion menace. Veteran telegrapher, old campaigner, Walters would be no refugee and could not be frightened out.

"Yes, the wires will talk again," White Cap agreed. "If we are not back on our reserve before they can follow up our trail, we will be arrested and tried for something evil over at Regina."

"What about the other chiefs' reserves?" demanded Shoot So Far. "Are there not reserves closer

at hand that you can get to and where you can take cover?"

"Yes, there are more reserves nearer," admitted White Cap. "There is Standing Buffalo's Reserve for one, and others lie all about."

Standing Buffalo instantly demurred.

"We cannot have trouble there," he pointed out. "My band's reserve is too handy to old Fort Qu'Appelle. It is right at the Fishing Lakes and on the Qu'Appelle River there. The Mounted Police post there is also too convenient. I would be arrested along with White Cap."

"Is there no other place we can drive these horse and cattle herds till Wild Elk comes?" Shoot So Far proposed. "There must be further ground where we can hide from this Constable Chester and the soldiers he is bringing with him. Why is there no shelter on the reserves round about Standing Buffalo's country? Who are the chiefs there?"

"There are many chiefs, many reserves," White Cap generalized, "but the trouble is to travel to them in a hurry, to travel with all we have gathered together. Either they are too far away to make sure sanctuary, or the trails to them are watched."

White Cap went on to enumerate the refuges, nearby and remote, although there was no means of being definitely sure about their attitude, since bands might have gone outside their allotted sections and still might not have taken a conspicuous stand for open rebellion. Other bands were known to be loyal so far. Some would waver. Perhaps the majority

would remain loyal, or at least neutral. If they were found off their own lawful territory, they could always gloss over the awkward circumstance with vague excuses about visiting relatives or hunting game out of the usual bounds.

White Cap's list took in all the adjacent districts. As well as Standing Buffalo's by the Fishing Lakes-Qu'Appelle River stretch, Pieapot's, Muskowpewing's and Pasquaw's bands, there were more Valley neighbors on the Crooked Lake-Round Lake-Qu'Appelle River territory. These comprised Sakimay's, Mosquito's band, O' Soup's band, Kakeewistahaw's, Kakeesheway's, Chacacma's—and the tally ran all the way from the Assiniboine River reserves to the Last Mountain Indian Reserve.

Up near Last Mountain, he mentioned Yellow Quill's Reserve at Big and Little Quill Lakes.

In the Big Touchwood Hills lay Poor Man's band and Day Star's band on their specified territories.

At the Little Touchwood Hills reposed the hunting home grounds of Muskowequin's band and George Gordon's band, reached by the North Trail to Fort Carlton.

The Key's, Gabriel Côté's, Gambler's bands sprawled over on the Assiniboine River, and more were beyond them, across the Manitoban line.

The File Hills held Little Black Bear's people, along with Star Blanket's, Okanesse's, Peekissis's, hunting bands east of the Touchwoods.

At the end of the Willow Bunch Trail on which the Free People, the R C A party and the U. S.

Cavalry were emerging rested the Moose Mountain Reserve, Pheasant Rump's band, Ocean Man's band, as well as White Bear's band.

Then, closer to the Double C Ranch and the Moffatt, perhaps, than any of the reserve territory, in the Indian Head Hills, squatted the band of The Man Who Took The Coat.

"So," decided White Cap, feeling that the moment had come when he could afford to wait no longer, "we are thrown away. We must ride quickly now."

"But what about Wild Elk?" persisted Shoot So Far doggedly, perversely.

"Wild Elk is too late, isn't he?" White Cap snarled. "Break this camp. Run the herds through the Coteau. If Wild Elk comes still, we will meet him. If we do not meet him, scatter the stock over the border and fall back on the trail to the elbow of the Saskatchewan River."

When Bart Chester reached the bottom of the Dirt Hills, he could see White Cap's horsemen riding madly in a circle, warning their camp to get instantly on the move.

However, Bucking Bart could not see the herds in the hollows below the hill rim, and as yet he had not cut any trail of stolen animals.

Still, from this point, he was able to sight a long way southward, and southward he could distinguish now the American cavalcade which the Sioux chief had seen before him.

Immediately Bart signaled the Home Guard ranchmen that R C A was in sight and yelled at Lieutenant

Merritt's patrol of Governor General's Bodyguards who were nearer.

"There's White Cap—on the run, Bill," Bart shouted. "Chase hard after him round those Hills on the north side. I'll join up with the R C A bunch and take the south side. White Cap's trail is clear enough. We'll corner him in the Coteau."

CHAPTER 23

The Call of the Northwest

BART loped on as his father, Moffat and Larry Walters joined him.

He waved an enthusiastic welcome to the R C A party from the distance that was rapidly lessening, thanks to the haste of both outfits to effect a meeting at the trails' junction.

"There's Keith on his bay River Gleam, and Paul Hull and Lily Levis, all out in front," cried Bart, more excited than he had been in scouting for White Cap among the Hills.

"But, Bart, who is that riding right on their heels?" teased his father shrewdly. "That, I presume, is the young lady called Golden Girl, and her father, Ted Ross, and those two on the prairie schooner seat will be Rider Imp Burt and Singing Nurse that I've heard about."

Bart caught Chester Senior's sly chuckle, but did not stop to answer his teasing comment.

"Hello, Keith-Paul-Lily," stammered Bart, growing very red in the face.

"Hello, Bart," shrilled Keith. "Man of your word, aren't you? Said in my last letter that I'd meet you at Qu'Appelle or thereabouts. So here we are—Scouts Culver and Ross, Rider Imp Burt, Nurse Ruby Fleury and Cousin Ilo Ross reporting with us for Canadian entrance."

"Free People returning to Canada," smiled Paul Hull, indicating his band in compliance with the reg-

ulations of the Mounted Police.

"Mark me down as just back from a home trip to Quebec," laughed Lily Levis, "and I think we all will be accounted for."

"It's great to see you all not scalped," blurted Bart. "Keith's postscript on his letter caused me some awful anxious moments. Then a Kansas man's news spurred me and Firestep every foot of the way back home here with troops to the Double G."

"We didn't delay to announce entry at the Wood Mountain police post because of a couple of fellows named Wild Elk and White Cap," put in Ilo's father, reining in his yellow horse Lion.

"White Cap did stage a reception party for you, but the troops, Lieutenant Bill Merritt's G. G. B. G., are breaking it up," grinned Bart. "Listen to that rising rumpus over yonder."

He pointed Cactus Hills way, beyond the Dirt Hills, from which the sound of hard riding and firing came in sporadic bursts, and nodded amiably to everyone in the R C A group, while checking off everyone. His eyes lingered longest on the face of Ilo Ross.

A golden girl she was, whether in the spring of Kansas or in Canada's snows, mounted on her sorrel mustang Dust Storm, her yellow, hooded mackinaw coat drawn over her riding costume, the frost tang scarlet on her cheeks, the frost shine blue in her eyes.

As their glances met, with that magnetic recognition given to two people who have heard and thought and speculated a lot about each other, Bart marvelled

at the call that had lured Ilo Northwest.

Was it just chance, or what fatalistic persons called Kismet, or was it the migrant urge, like the pulse of winging flocks already on their way from the south, stage by stage over open water—that buoyant wonder-winging of the West which would fill the sky any day now, as soon as the Chinook blew and the lakes and rivers broke up?

"You figure Ilo lives up to advertisements?" asked Ruby Fleury, interpreting Bart's lingering glance at the glowing Kansas girl.

"I should say so," breathed Bart. "Keith didn't write the half of it. This is Chester Senior, Miss Ilo, and neighbor Moffatt and a friend of yours from Kansas City itself."

"I'm terribly glad you gentlemen made it an armed escort," Ilo thanked them sincerely; "deeply grateful to reach the vicinity of the Double C with a whole skin. It was fine work of you and your son, Mr. Chester, and Mr. Moffatt, too, and—Larry Walters!"

Ilo checked herself momentarily, drawing a deep breath in her astonishment.

"My goodness, Larry," she continued impulsively, "this is a surprise. I didn't dream—"

"Who?" exploded Keith. "Larry—here?"

"Larry, what inarnation whisked you in ahead of us?" chirped Rider Imp Burt.

"Thains, you might know," boasted Larry loyally.

"And what brought you?" asked Ted Ross in a delighted bellow.

"Same thing as you," Walters declared. "The

Northwest call—Bob Armstrong's wire."

"Bob's the only Kansas cuss missing from this friendly gathering," commented Ruby Fleury facetiously. "Any word from Bob? Anybody seen him lately?"

Bart shook his head in a fashion which for him seemed a little worried.

"Wires are cut," he explained. "Prince Albert is isolated for the time being. It'll be weeks maybe before Major Crozier has any communication with the troops who will come in under General Middleton. Every messenger Crozier sends with despatches through Riel's lines is intercepted and chucked into Riel's dungeon at Batoche. So now I guess it will be Bob's job to worm through from his end to the Humboldt Telegraph Station, and our job to meet him there with Larry Walters and start despatches working while the advance on the rebels begins. Close co-operation of the Mounted, with our scouts out ahead of the militia, is the command from headquarters, and the Governor General's Bodyguards have certainly made a quick start. Listen again! That firing's getting closer, I figure."

Bart swung Firestep round, in order to locate the echoes better.

"Yes," he decided, "it's on the edge of the Coteau yonder. Must be in that badly broken ground behind the scrub bushes. Not the United States Cavalry shooting, too, is it?"

"U. S. Cavalry's camping at the boundary line ac-

according to law," observed Keith, "except for the officers coming on with that wagon. Major Wade and Colonel Butt, large as life and mysterious as ever. I wonder what they're going to spring on us next?"

CHAPTER 24

Gatling Guns for Captain "Gat" Howard

THE U. S. officers rode up on their dappled gray and chestnut horses.

As they stopped in front of Bart, they saluted him with due ceremony.

Bart returned their salute smartly, his admiring eye on their fine, well-equipped mounts.

"This is Constable Bartley, 'Bucking Bart' Chester," Keith introduced with the same ceremony: "the Mounted friend, the Double C friend, hunting pal and all-round good comrade I told you officers about. Bart, this is Major Wade and Colonel Butt, United States Army."

"Bringing credentials to your Regina headquarters, Constable Chester," nodded Major Wade in his friendliest mood.

"And the Gatling guns for Captain 'Gat' Howard, sir," added Colonel Butt, his benignant pop-eyes on the rolling U. S. Army vehicle.

The Northern Major gave Bart two papers.

"U. S. Army drafts for supplies from Scout Culver's and Scout Ross' R C A Range en route, payable in Canadian funds to Culver and Ross," Wade announced with an official tapping of the documents.

The Southern Colonel smiled mildly at Keith and gave Ted Ross a subtle wink.

"I assured you, Culver, that we were soldiers and men of honor," he reminded Keith courteously.

"And no warrants?" shouted Keith. "You have no

warrants for Ted or myself?"

"We have only two warrants," stated Major Wade, "warrants for Diamond-Thumb Jerome Platte and Whispering Cree, which we hope to serve in the proper time and place with the cooperation and at the suggestion of the Mounted Police. They will probably know Diamond-Thumb's and Whispering's whereabouts at the present moment."

Bart Chester grinned knowingly.

"Louis Riel's runners Diamond-Thumb Jerome Platte and Whispering Cree have been a lot of places lately," he told the American officer warrant bearers. "Inciting Poundmaker outside Battleford, inciting Little Pine and Big Bear up around Fort Pitt, inciting almost everybody in Batoche. That's where Diamond-Thumb and Whispering are now—at Batoche."

"When you've arrested them and we've served our warrants, we'll still have to interview Scout Robert Armstrong before our military mission north of the border will be finished," explained Colonel Butt.

Bart grinned a wider and a more knowing grin at the Colonel's guarded word of reference to Bob.

"This outfit plans to meet up with Scout Robert Armstrong somewhere in that vicinity, too," he advised Wade and Butt. "So Batoche is the very place to do those three things. Meantime, the Double C offers you every hospitality, Major, every accommodation, Colonel, till we are able to get away shortly. Chester Senior and neighbor Moffat will make you and the ladies feel right at home and invite the

Mounted Police from Regina Barracks, the Lieutenant-Governor and his wife, with all the Parliamentary notables, the town elite, newsmen, militiamen and everybody to drop in to tea. Eh, Dad, isn't that right?"

"Yes, by all means, and we'll certainly match your Southern courtesy, Colonel Butt, your Northern friendliness, Major Wade," promised Mortimer Chester eagerly. "Lily Levis being a gubernatorial secretary, we'll positively guarantee the social end. It'll be like Government House or maybe the White House. Make no mistake about it. That invitation is to include everybody, especially Captain Paul Hull's Free People."

"Of course," trilled Lily gladly. "Ilo, Ruby, and the rest will just love to meet the Lieutenant-Governor Dewdney and Mrs. Dewdney, *Monsieur* and *Madame* Forget and everyone else at the Double C Ranch. So we'll ride right along."

As Chester Senior and Moffatt wheeled with their riders to lead the way back to the ranches along the south side of the Hills on the route which paralleled the Bodyguards' advance on the north side, where Bart planned to corner White Cap's band in its flight, the reports of furious firing grew louder and an ominous drumming sound cut through the sharp fusillade.

Keith Culver looked significantly at Ted Ross while he listened a moment to the rushing hum which seemed to him so familiar.

"Not all ridden Indian ponies, are they, Ted, do

"you think?" Keith asked.

"No, there are a lot of loose hoofs flying in that bunch," Ted decided.

"What I calculated," Keith nodded. "Not all horse hoofs, either, are they?"

"Steer hoofs, too, or I never cocked my ear to a run-off at night."

The two scouts from Kansas were the first to catch the sinister note in the clear, wintry March air, but they were only a jump or two ahead of Ilo on Dust Storm riding alongside Bart Chester's Firestep.

The moment that strange reverberation echoed in her ears, Ilo pulled up Dust Storm.

"Do you figure it's a stampede?" she demanded, jumping instinctively to conclusions.

"I didn't see cattle, or horses, enough for that, or in fact any horses or cattle," Bart answered. "Still, it might be the start of a run-off. So don't ride out in front just yet for a minute, Miss Ilo."

Bart almost unconsciously reached out to lay a restraining hand on her arm, and there was a definite thrill of excitement for both in that touch.

His red-uniformed figure loomed huge beside her as he stood up in his stirrups to get a better look into the valleys, and she saw that the expression in his eyes was a little grim while he watched the openings in the Hills.

Up on his prairie schooner seat, Rider Imp Burt had a loftier view.

"Yonder they come," Rider Imp cried, as the line of scrub bushes on the elevation commenced to sway

in wild and violent motion, like the sudden twisting of a vagrant whirlwind.

"Both cattle and horse herds," Ruby Fleury remarked, "and I never saw them amalgamate in any peaceable manner in my short lifetime."

Ruby promptly unlimbered the Springfield rifle stuck in the straps of her nursing grip.

Rider Imp took the hint, hitched his two six-guns round on his hips and leaned his Winchester handy between his knees against the dash.

Precautionary movements spread simultaneously through the entire alert group. Ilo saw her father swing his Spencer rifle round and noted Keith rubbing the sights of his new Henry weapon. Paul Hull's Free People, too, handled their arms, ready for an emergency.

Ilo slipped her own hand under her mackinaw coat to feel the belt gun at her waist, and glimpsed Lily doing the same thing.

Off to the north and west of them, as far away as the scrub lasted, broken sections of the hidden herds pushed through the bushes. Here a band of horses trotted together. There a bunch of longhorns forged ahead in a compact drove. The ponies and the steers did not mingle, but both drifted rapidly south and east toward the lower ground in a maneuver strikingly similar to that of drought-ridden animals seeking water in summer.

"What's taking them that way?" demanded Ted Ross. "If they're bound to high-tail it, they should be hunting their home range instead of looking this di-

rection into the U. S. A."

"It might be the springs they smell," guessed Bart Chester. "The Effervescence Springs are over yonder, and they're not frozen to the bottom. Keep open, mostly. The trail goes that far."

"Maybe they do get a whiff of that salty smell," Keith Culver admitted, "but I can't fool myself into believing those herds aren't driven. White Cap and the Sioux you're chasing will be doing the driving. We're due to get in front of a bang-up stampede, Bart, if we don't head it off."

"Consarn White Cap," growled Bart; "it's just my luck to miss seeing where the Sioux entered the Hills with their stolen stock. I was in too big a hurry to spot the chief himself, I guess. It was my calculation that Lieutenant Bill Merritt might have got round him on the other side by now. If he sneaks away, it'll have a bad effect on the other Indian camps, giving both the Mounted Police and the soldiers the go-by."

Bucking Bart took another sweeping survey of the Coteau break in the border plain.

"However, this Red River caravan can't afford to become disorganized on the trail," he continued. "It's your command, Captain Paul. Start your cart string along mighty fast and keep it going."

"At once, for it's no place to corral the wagons and wait it out," nodded Captain Paul Hull. "Push ahead is the trick—and quietly. Ask Major Wade and Colonel Butt to go easy with those Gatlings, and don't let any of the Double C and Moffatt ranch hands commence shooting to turn the cattle. We'll

slip through, silent as a moccasin, or else somebody will cause a stampede that can't be stopped."

"Don't worry, Captain Paul, for Ted Ross and I can hold them till you get your outfit moving," promised Keith.

Keith and Ilo's father wheeled their horses across the slant of the Coteau, noiselessly driving the leading ponies and steers back from the Effervescence Springs Trail so that the Free People could cut over without dangerous crowding and pass ahead on the Willow Bunch Trail, angling northeastward into clear country.

A Run-off of Longhorns Stopped

THE Red River caravan went warily, fully prepared if the leaders of the horse and cattle drift should dispute the path with Keith Culver and Ted Ross and rush against their carts filing past as closely as possible after one another.

The steers were the wildest, chasing round and tossing lowered heads, as if to horn in among the vehicles and trample a hole in the winding chain, but Keith and Ted faced them coolly, edging them away in a turning movement which the two scouts' mounts, River Gleam and Lion, helped by their quick, trained maneuvering in rounding up faultlessly any breaking longhorn.

Keith saw that the cattle were all strong and well-nourished, in spite of the snow. He knew that these well-conditioned animals, ponies as well as steers, had been fed and rested repeatedly along the south branch of the Saskatchewan, as they were driven from one plundered ranch to another. Judging by the fine appearance of the stock, the plundering had been extensive. In a run-off over the border, fodder was still available—settlers' haystacks by the Willow Bunch, on the Poplar, beyond Wood Mountain.

"It looks as if the Sioux and Crees have been living off the fat of the land," Keith observed, "wiping up the homesteads as they trailed along."

"I wonder if a lot of it wasn't plumb, grim necessity," Ted ventured. "There has been quite a heap

of suffering on the plains. Paul Hull was telling me how it had been a hard winter for hunters on the prairie roundabout. Paul went pretty far south himself this trip."

"All they got to do is stay on the reserves and keep quiet," his partner pointed out. "They're always well fed on the reserves."

While they successfully held the drift so far, Constable Chester had spoken with Major Wade and Colonel Butt about the guns.

"Not too far ahead, Major," he requested of the Northern cavalry officer.

"I'll keep them handy enough to go into action," Wade suggested crisply.

"You see, sir, you might have to use them yourself," the Colonel put in seriously.

"I hope not," declared Bart. "I should not like to have any disturbance at the speeding moment, till I see these steers milling quietly on the home ground and the ponies corralled."

"Work them back toward the Double C," Chester Senior directed. "You can let them stay there and on the Moffatt till you get time to check up the brands and restore them to the rightful owners."

The riders of the Moffatt and the Double C were already driving the foremost animals which Keith and Ted turned back, swerving them in the direction of the home ranches. They kept up the pressure steadily, moving at the same brisk pace as the cart caravan to allow it free movement along the main trail of the Willow Bunch. The cavalcade pulled

ahead compactly, without a visible break, as if cart shafts, travois poles and wagon reaches were linked, travelling like a line of bull train prairie schooners coupled in trail behind the oxen. The bellowing cattle flanked them on the left, but their passage in front was clear. If their luck held, it would remain that way till they could wind by the outer buttes and take advantage of the open plain that stretched to the limits of the Double C.

Ilo Ross and Bart picked this favorable moment to ride out on the Willow Bunch, where Larry Walters waited, watching Keith and Ted make the cut-off to join the group.

"Your R. C. A technique sure does the job, Keith," lauded Bart. "It works smooth as silk."

"Herding cattle's the same, any spot in the United States or Canada," stated Keith cheerfully. "Only trouble is when you've made a road, somebody else helps himself to it. Sioux heading for the border won't be long finding this one is passable."

While Keith spoke, a wild yell sounded not far to their rear.

"Told you so," Keith went on. "Sioux going to charge out of that scrubby cover in a minute. You're higher up, Larry. Can you sight any of them yet?"

Larry Walters sat his borrowed cavalry horse on a little eminence overlooking the flow of steer backs and pony manes going by on either slope of it.

"No Sioux yet, Keith," he reported, "but it must be the danged bare-backers. No room here for any-

one else. Tell you when they bob up."

Through the sonorous commotion of the stamping stock rolled the sharper, tattoo-like ring of ridden ponies' hoofs. Larry saw a fringe of low shrubbery flatten to those hoofs, plain evidence of horsemen massed in considerable numbers. They came through in a body, red riders straining to hoist the herds over the border in the path they had started them out on at first. Walters recognized them as Sioux from the Canadian side, but the swiftest rider of them all, lashing out in front, was a Teton Sioux from the American side.

"There's Shoot So Far," Larry yelled to Bart Chester. "Delivered his message, all right."

"Who do you say, Larry?" barked Keith.

"Shoot So Far, from our own country," Walters commenced to explain the courier's presence in Canada.

Larry was just going on to enlarge on this, when Bart Chester shook his head for silence.

"Don't tell Keith yet that Texican Towers and the R C A cowhands are trailing Wild Elk's band over the border," Bart managed to warn the telegrapher. "I was going to, but that firing in the Coteau stopped me up thundering short."

"Why?" asked Walters wonderingly.

"Because Wild Elk's band must have got caught up out there. Texican's boys and the American Sioux must be doing that shooting. If Keith and Ted Ross savvied it was R C A powder burning, they'd duck back and help burn it. That might spoil things

for Texican. Wait a bit to tell them."

Shoot So Far came rushing on at the head of the Sioux. Bart Chester watched their shifting ranks to see if White Cap was there, acting as leader, but he could not distinguish the wily chief anywhere in the van.

"White Cap's not here in person," Bart commented drily. "More likely he's in the rear, on the north side, leading the retreat. Lieutenant Bill Merritt had better keep his eyes skinned."

"What in tarnation's Shoot So Far riding with White Cap's men for?" inquired Ted Ross suspiciously, turning his puzzled eyes toward the farther Coteau. "Why did he travel so mighty far and fast? We weren't slouching any on the Canada Trail, and here's Shoot So Far in ahead of us with a reception committee."

While he stared and talked Ted listened to fresh reverberations in the Coteau recesses, and somehow vaguely connected Shoot So Far with those reports, although he had no more reason to believe there was any connection than he had for the average Western hunch.

"What brings you here, Shoot So Far?" Ted demanded in the Sioux tongue, which he spoke a little.

"I came to avenge Flame Eye," answered Shoot So Far boldly. "I would find Young Kansas Devil who killed him by the Marsh of Whooping Cranes."

"Well, you haven't very far to look," retorted Ted. "Keith is right here. Who's to help you? Didn't you tote your tribe along with you? Or have you got

them cached away handy some place to take a whack at dry-gulching us?"

Again Ted's glance switched uncertainly to the Hills, as if he half suspected Shoot So Far might be engineering some dead-sure ambush from there.

Before Shoot So Far could reply, Constable Bart Chester shoved his mount Firestep across the Teton's wild course, forcing him to an abrupt halt, while the Sioux directly behind snow-skidded around him, pulling their own ponies back on their haunches with stiffened forelegs ploughing furrows and spattering ice all about like showering buckshot.

"You're off your Indian territory without U. S. A. permission, Shoot So Far," Bart checked him up. "You're an undesirable alien in Canada. You crossed the boundary without reporting to the Mounted Police. So you get yourself arrested. Come along with me to Regina Barracks."

Bart reached out and grabbed Shoot So Far's bridle rein, swinging his pony in a semicircle among the bushes beside the beaten trail.

Shoot So Far's companions launched forward again at the Constable's action, bearing down against the moving herds in the way and crowding some of the ponies and steers into the trail among the mounts of the whites about Bart Chester. This intervention caused a sudden additional congestion on the Double C and Moffatt riders up ahead and even blocked Major Wade and Colonel Butt with their guns for the moment. Several rampaging knots of steers broke aside, one longhorned quartette bumping between

the prancing horses of Shoot So Far and Bart, sending the Sioux pony tugging wildly on the length of its bridle rein gripped tightly in the Constable's fist.

Bart held stubbornly, yanking this way and that at every shift of the squeezing animals. Shoot So Far flung his rifle forward, but the watchful Constable whirled his horse powerfully on all fours, slanting the rifle barrel high and wide. The steel collided with the lunging horns of the steers, was knocked out of Shoot So Far's hands and exploded on the ground.

At the shot in their faces, the stolen cattle broke away on one side of the trail, the stolen ponies on the other. A steer horn cut Shoot So Far's rein like a thread, and the Teton Sioux whirled his horse past Bart's Firestep into the rout.

CHAPTER 26

In the Stampede Path

YELLING a warning to the others, Bart wheeled and followed Shoot So Far through the rush of frightened animals running from the Sioux horsemen.

"Look out, or they'll all stampede in a minute," he bellowed. "Hold them. Keep turning. Don't let any more across the trail. I'll grab that confounded Teton before he gets bumped off his pony in this mess of crazy cattle."

The steers surged against him and Keith Culver, who brought River Gleam to his help, smartly rounding up the nearest and headed them sharply about, even against the Sioux pressure from the farther side. The Sioux could see Shoot So Far riding free, straining for escape from the Redcoat dodging dangerously after him wherever the erratic shifting of the herds made a passage. They whooped to the Teton, shrilling encouragement, assuring him that they were coming to his aid, and lashed on with greater speed than ever.

It was white riders against red, the Indians triumphantly trying to seize a favorable moment to send a general stampede smashing down upon the wagon string, the scouts and ranch hands doggedly fighting to hold off that avalanche of beef, to avert the pony hoof-hazard behind it. Under twin threats they worked, a double stampede menace, for all the stolen stock was imbued with a common panic and legging it in a runaway gait. Where they had been passing

smoothly from Keith and Ted on to the Double C and Moffatt riders, they began to charge violently. The open lanes which had been characteristic of their orderly movement changed into cramped zigzag channels and circular bare spots of narrow diameter which had no apparent beginning or end but wound spiral-shape, like coil springs or carelessly tossed ribbons of black in the glistening snow.

Impeded by the crush, the cart caravan was forcing its way. Rider Imp Burt's covered wagon and the Gatling guns were hardly turning a wheel. The steers, crowding Bart Chester and Keith, handicapped the Constable still further in his effort to gain on Shoot So Far, carrying them roughly farther apart.

Aiming to join the Teton, his Sioux friends penetrated the herds recklessly, yelling louder and firing their rifles in the air to start the stampede in earnest the minute they should reach him. The rear rolled up on Keith and Bart in their chase, the horns at their horses' flanks, although the white men matched wits against the Sioux and tried to turn the charge.

"Look out, they're coming strong," Keith cautioned, while they dodged and spun. "Think you'll give your prisoner up? Looks as if we have our hands full enough without Shoot So Far."

"No, I won't give him up," declared Bart evenly. "I'll get him, stampede or no stampede. Also, stampede or not, these cattle aren't going to be run across the border. The boys just have to twist their tails and slant their horns back again, till Lieutenant Bill Merritt and his Bodyguards close in tight on White

Cap's band. Bill ought to be on top of him any minute now, surely. Then neither White Cap nor Shoot So Far will have much more time to waste on stampedes. It'll be every man for himself and the military take the hindmost."

Bart swerved Firestep as he spoke, avoiding a pair of long-legged, rangy steers which were swaying shoulder to shoulder and in imminent danger of collision with him, coming like a yoked team out of the muddle of beasts—wild horses, wild cattle, Indian ponies, saddled cow ponies, cavalry mounts, wagon, cart, and travois animals.

"Watch out, Keith, that's a nasty couple," he warned his companion. "More ugly customers right behind those Texas twins."

Keith sent River Gleam sidestepping with a narrow margin in the running horde where every broken, trained horse poised or moved swiftly like his own on sure, nimble feet. Ted's Lion, Ilo's Dust Storm, Paul Hull's brown buffalo runner, Major Wade's dappled gray, Colonel Butt's chestnut were there, and all the rest of the range riders' mounts off the Double C and the Moffatt, each horse's character as definitely put on its mettle in that test of tense alertness as its owner's.

River Gleam's side-dance fooled the nasty pair. The twin longhorns scraped hair with a swish and bored on past Keith and Bart, wedging straight into the path of the covered wagon alongside which Ilo rode with her father. Ted Ross was busy jamming away another bunch. Ilo had her head tilted momentarily

up toward the prairie schooner seat, exchanging a swift word of feminine conference with Ruby Fleury. He failed to notice the two unruly steers till they had shouldered several more of their fellows around the wagon wheels, and Bart saw that in the space of seconds she would be hemmed in against the spokes in her solitary position.

Giving Shoot So Far a further instant's handicap, he wheeled Firestep to split the pair of steers. Over the covered wagon dash, Rider Imp Burt yelled like a buzz-saw now and hurled his whip snap-snapping into the longhorns' faces. The Oregon-born driver felt his Winchester, too, and Ruby half rose with her Springfield, but caution held their fingers from the triggers. They might drop those steers with well-placed shots, but a stumbling block of bodies could easily cause a pile-up, and rifle reports under their noses might bring far more insanely careening over such a barricade.

With a shock the runaways brought up against the obstacle of the wagon, partially entangling themselves, horning and kicking the wheel rims, the bolsters, the reach. But the loaded wagon refused to topple and to make a breach through which the herds might pour and gain their border freedom in an uncontrollable rush. All the while Rider Imp laid on the lash, whacking back the cattle, skillfully nursing his gray leaders and his black wheelers, so that they held the vehicle firmly upright by a shrewd, powerful straining ahead.

"This is one time you'd rather drive than ride,

Rider Imp," Ruby Fleury chaffed him. "Ilo, too, I'm dead certain, if I could only give her a hand up."

Ruby leaned riskily down the punished side of the wagon, extending an arm to full length, but could not reach Ilo.

"Jump, Ilo," Ruby begged earnestly, with maternal solicitude. "Climb, honey child. Let Dust Storm chance it loose."

Rapidly manipulating her reins, pointing her horse's nose at every fast-closing aperture, to see it balk at dashing through, Ilo shook her head stubbornly.

"No, Ruby, if Dust Storm's got to face it, I will, too," she refused.

The thundering plunge on the blockaded forefront threatened to submerge her and the pony. She was backed helplessly against the hubs, without any more room to maneuver to safety, when Bart Chester's Firestep reared up suddenly from the mass of horns, heads and backs, leaping toward her.

Bart had split the leaders, the Texas twins, but their momentum had carried his mount along between them. Unable, in the restricted space he had near the wagon, to clear them properly, or shunt one off, he could only bring Firestep up on his hind legs, wheel sharply in front and trust to luck. Now the twin racers were practically a trio—till Bart's whirl abruptly separated Firestep from them as he lunged for the girl.

Looking down from his wagon seat, Rider Imp read the Constable's mind and action. Bucking Bart was trusting to luck, all right, in his final jump to

rescue the bright-faced girl from being unhorsed and trampled, but Rider Imp himself was not a man who trusted to luck while there was a Winchester in his hand. Looping the lines round his left elbow, he swung his rifle and fired twice into the two outlaw steers' faces.

The powder flame singed the beasts' nostrils. The bullets glanced from their horns with a rattle and a ping. Instinctively the longhorns ducked and doubled, holding up the stampeding bunch behind, fighting those animals shoving them so hard, pushing them back equally hard in a complete turnabout.

Rider Imp's shots afforded Bart the chance he wanted so badly.

"Great gunning, Rider Imp," he called his thanks to the driver. "That opens things up a bit."

He brought Firestep down on all fours again in the spot which the wheeling steers had vacated right under the rearing horse's front hoofs.

"Shucks, nothing much but a turn at target practice," chuckled Bart modestly. "Better than rolling tomato cans and puncturing playing cards."

Rider Imp raised his cheek from the Winchester stock, to find Ruby Fleury doing the same thing with her Springfield.

"Your shots, or mine, Ruby?" he propounded shrewdly, sniffing the smoke curling from her muzzle.

"I don't know," answered Ruby, mischief in her sighting eye. "I only emptied the magazine—into the upper air."

"Wonder you didn't shoot Bart, or Ilo," grinned

Rider Imp, "firing promiscuous like that."

"Yes, it was a narrow escape, maybe, with the Constable stunt-riding his Police horse so dizzily," Ruby admitted. "No wonder they call him Bucking Bart. Look at him plunge!"

Bart did not stop to ponder on escape or flying bullets past Firestep's ears. He lifted his mount in close to the wagon they drove. Ruby and Rider Imp saw him seize Dust Storm's bit, drag Ilo's sorrel out of the trap and back the girl around till they both circled free in the gap of the breaking herd.

CHAPTER 27

Wrong Prisoner

SHAKING a little from strain and effort, Ilo could hardly draw breath enough at first for words of gratitude, and intuitively she knew that Bart was not the kind of man to pause for thanks. Yet she recovered her poise almost instantly, and her smile came back naturally as his eloquent reward.

"Bruised at all?" he asked solicitously.

Her arms and legs were sore, her shoulders ached and her head throbbéd from the crushing pressure against the wagon in that perilous moment before his spectacular arrival, but she felt, too, that Bart was not an individual who cared for complaint, even feminine complaint, when it did not happen to be official, so she passed it off lightly.

"No, I'm all fit and fine—now," she laughed, with just a trace of nervousness. "Only you've got the wrong prisoner, haven't you?"

Bart smiled also, an appreciative smile with a sudden flash of tenderness in it, and his eyes lingered warmly on her fairness—exquisite in spite of the violence of her recent struggle—in the magnetic way his glance had been attracted at their first face to face meeting on the trail.

"Not if it's going to be a life term," he declared. "Still, there is a right captive I'd better keep after, long as you're safe. I guess you are, tolerably. Here's paternal care."

Ted Ross had turned his belligerent bunch, head-

ing them round in the direction of the ranches once more, and he came tearing alongside. Out of the corner of his eye, he had glimpsed Ilo's predicament while he fought them, and he had jerked Lion about instantly to her aid.

"Great jumping catfish!" her father clarified. "I was afraid you were gored, Ilo. How'd you miss all those prodding steer horns?"

"Dust Storm did the dodging, Dad," she belittled the danger, now that it was past. "He's just perfect in a pinch."

"Seems to me these mix-ups aren't quite the place for women folks," Ted worried. "I should have left you at home with Ruby, I guess, and not started her out Northwest, either."

"I'm mighty glad you didn't, Ross," confessed Bart. "I wouldn't have missed meeting Ilo at the border a while back for all the Western world."

Ted Ross stared at him curiously a moment, while about them rumbled and shifted the churning herds of cattle and ponies driven, and held, at last, on the same side of the Willow Bunch Trail.

"That's putting a pretty high value on her acquaintance, isn't it?" inquired Ross wonderingly.

"None too high," vowed Bart.

"Anyway, Constable, it was a thundering good turn you did us right there," Ted voiced his gratitude simply. "A turn we ought to duplicate—although it'll sure take some duplicating."

"Maybe you'll get your chance, Ross," Bart hazarded. "You never know at this game when some-

thing's going to knock your plans all to blazes. Shoot So Far got reprieved, rather unforeseen like, but I think his time should be up. Here's Keith, to help keep the drive going ranchward."

Keith Culver followed Ted Ross, maneuvering out of the crush mere seconds behind him. Impelled by the same anxiety for Ilo, whom he had not been able to see any too well from the distance in the quick shift of horses, men and animals, Keith dashed in among the group. There was a shade of puzzled alarm in his eyes, but he laughed boyishly when he saw her safe and sound and straight in the saddle.

"You lucky girl," he broke out. "Cousin mine, you had me shaking like a cottonwood leaf and praying like a parson for a minute."

Ilo felt a great relief from inward panic and tension in his gay mood.

"I don't doubt but that you're religious enough, Keith," she bantered. "Only I know you never had the ague in your life, and I can't conjure up anything else that ever shook your nerve."

"Well, we've changed their minds and changed their course slightly," rejoiced Keith, his comprehensive stare sweeping the altered movement of the stock. "We've twisted their tails in the right compass line. Trick is to keep those appendages from unwinding. Any place the Sioux can turn them across again on us, Bart?"

"Only in the dip of the Hills to the Effervescence Springs, yonder," Bart pointed out. "Neither the Indian ponies nor the herds can cross that Springs basin

itself, because the Springs aren't frozen and hoofs bog in it exactly as they do in muskeg, even though it looks so frosty all round."

"It's only a narrow neck," speculated Keith swiftly, "and a rolling caravan will block it—bottle Shoot So Far's yelling horsemen up tight on this side of the Hills and shut the Willow Bunch Trail for him. What do you say we take it, Bart? Quickest way to grab out your missing man."

"What about those soft spots, Keith?" asked Bart cautiously. "Can't afford to bog this outfit for a single minute."

"We can corduroy if we strike a sinking rut," Keith suggested. "Throw in some of those tepee poles off the Red River carts. Pick them up behind and use again—ad infinitum."

Bart chuckled in sudden recollection of the long road from the East over which he had come so rapidly.

"Lot of men are talking foreign languages, modern languages, ancient languages on the Northwest Trail," he joked. "Private Needler, of the Queen's Own Rifles, started that in Toronto. Where'd you learn so much Latin, Keith?"

"Hunting with an English college graduate named Bartley Chester," Keith shot back promptly. "Listening to his orations—which I didn't get at school. "Come on, let's risk the dip and corduroy."

"Sling ahead, then, and corduroy," agreed the Constable. "I'll keep an eye on Shoot So Far and follow him the moment the wagons are across the dip."

Up the trail, on the right flank of the herds, Chester Senior, Moffatt and Larry Walters rode with the range hands, keeping the cattle surging on toward the Double C. Major Wade and Colonel Butt were next, traveling between the cart string and the prairie schooner so as to have some freedom of action if Constable Chester needed their aid. Followed by Rider Imp Burt and Ruby Fleury in the covered wagon, and keeping close to either stirrup of Ilo's River Gleam, Keith and Ted edged into the dip for the crossing of the Effervescence Springs.

In the basin below them, the overflow of the Springs pooled in places, forming a half congealed surface that presented no solid footing for man or horse. Instinct guided the animals in keeping to the hard spots, for off the strips of frozen ground hoofs would sink through the scum ice as if it were cream, and the mud underneath spread soft and treacherous as a coulee bottom.

Paul Hull came down first with Lily Levis, looking after the women and children of the Free People caravan, some riding their ponies and old travois mares, others perched on top of the carts. Keith and Ted pulled a few tepee poles from the carts while they passed, in readiness for an emergency.

"Easier to prevent a bog-down than to haul it out afterwards, Paul," remarked Keith. "Especially when you have some timber handy."

"Help yourself," laughed Paul. "I'll sing out if there's any sign of getting stuck, although I think we'll manage to work through all right before the

Sioux can cause us trouble. Lily, you had better keep with Ilo. No more cattle jams, I hope, Ilo. That was a very narrow escape."

"Yes, Ilo, too fortunate an escape to risk it twice," commented Lily. "Are you sure you haven't had too much of a shake-up to chance it a second time? Perhaps you'd better take to the wagons."

Ilo instantly objected.

"Oh, no, Lily, I'm glued to the saddle yet," she laughed. "I'll ride it out, and I don't give two hoots for stampede, double stampede or Indian charge. We'll swallow what comes and look for more. Only let's be moving right smart."

"All right, but I must say you're game to the core, Ilo," agreed Lily gaily. "Now hurry up, Paul, and make the crossing. Don't get Ilo caught like that again."

Paul's eyes flashed animatedly as he reined his brown buffalo runner into the dip at her urging, and his smile deepened as he caught her vivacious mood. Without pausing or delaying, he surveyed his lovely cousin and the Kansas beauty, comparing, contrasting both girls and including in his admiring glance Ruby Fleury on the wagon above. Somehow, when his thoughts turned to the ladies, Paul could never exclude Ruby now. The intimacy of companionship in his own camp for so long had established a strange bond between them which he was hardly able to define. It might have been due to the exercise of his habitual gallantry towards her, or perhaps to the growth of romance. Paul was prosaic and practical

enough to contend that a free heart should accompany free limbs and free spirit on the prairie road the Free People took. Yet there could be no denying that Ruby cast a spell. While he glanced at her, Ruby's voice was vibrating in its deep, rich alto tone from the wagon seat—a voice slightly querulous and plaintive, calling to Ilo.

"Ilo, do climb up here, sweetness," Ruby pleaded. "You can lead Dust Storm at the tail-board."

"Wouldn't insult Dust Storm that way, Ruby," Ilo protested. "Dust Storm doesn't shelter behind canvas tops. Always picks his way."

"But, honey girl, you'll give me heart failure if I've got to clutch for you again," complained her anxious chaperone. "I'm more careless than your father, even. I might have known enough to put my foot down on your coming away into Canada like this on such a dangerous trail."

Ilo looked at Bart.

Bart's admiring gaze was on her just the same as before. The same tenderness glowed in his smile, but she sensed something more in his expression and caught a new flash of inquiry in his eye.

She answered that inquiry with frankness identical to that which he had shown.

"I'm mighty glad you didn't put your foot down, Ruby," Ilo confessed. "I'm running into a fresh thrill here at every turn of the trail."

Something impelled Paul Hull promptly to offer his tribute and to pay his compliment too.

"I should have been very sorry, Ruby," he con-

fided significantly, "if you had chaperoned Ilo in Kansas."

In the lower level of the dip, the firing on the Coteau side echoed louder than ever, indicating that it could not be far away, and almost simultaneously with their entrance the reports on the north rim of the junction of the Dirt Hills and the Cactus Hills redoubled in volume. On the Hills it was apparently the uniform rattle of the heavy army rifles, but in the ravines of the Coteau the crack-crack of carbines was spaced with even more rapid and more resounding explosions.

Instantly Keith's trained frontier ear detected the difference in the dull and sharp detonations. He looked at Bart Chester to see if the Constable noted the significant mixture of shots, but Bart seemed reluctant to remark on them, although evidently he interpreted the gun talk as easily as did Keith.

"Shorter barrels in there somewhere, Bart," commented Keith very pointedly.

"Yes, sounds like a little muzzle up-jump," admitted Bart carelessly. "Real squat carbines will speak like that if they are good and dirty."

For all his careless reply, Bart gave Paul Hull the signal to pull through faster.

"Take it with a plunge, Paul," he suggested. "We have to make it without a halt. Watch your wheels."

The firing was louder still.

Keith still listened keenly.

"Six-guns yonder," Keith decided. "Fanning the hammers over in there a piece."

"Maybe," conceded Bart, feeling himself very closely cornered at last.

"Any other Home Guard ranchers out that way?" demanded Keith persistently. "Must be cowboys."

"Your guess is good, Keith," Bart nodded. "I expect there are a few strays, and they'll be cutting into White Cap's line of flight in a minute. I sure can't imagine him getting clear away."

Paul Hull's cart string went at the Effervescence Springs ice-bridged crossing on the run. The down slant favored him, the momentum helping to carry the weight over the thin spots, and wherever a wheel rim spurted ooze, Keith and Ted pushed in the poles to prevent it sinking. They wound among tussocks and straggling tufts of sedges firmly implanted in the old dead growth of marsh hay. And while Keith swiftly raced here, there and all over in the basin trail, his mind winged back like a migrant bird to the Marsh of Whooping Cranes, to the open waters of the South and the flocks seeking such nesting ground as this, bringing the miracle of Western spring upon their pinions.

There was no open water here yet except the restricted outlets of the Springs, but in the cup of the Hills there was shelter from the March wind; and he knew that, not many days ahead, a sweep of warm sun, accompanied by a puff of balmy breeze like the magic Chinook from the Rocky Mountains, would melt at a stroke the thin frost-shell that carried them.

They might be the last to cross, and even now they could not make the ticklish traverse if the Sioux with

Shoot So Far caught them halfway through.

Keith jumped in at every suspicious slowing of a vehicle, forestalling delay.

---"Whip up," he yelled. "Keep them rolling. Yonder come the Sioux. Pony heads on the hill crests. We've got to beat them across the valley."



The Road to Escape

SATISFIED with the deft way in which Keith and Ilo's father were earduroying, handling the poles and speeding the carts, Bart Chester gave Rider Imp Burt on his prairie schooner the sign to risk it, and waved the drivers of the clumsier wagons and the cavalry men with the Gatling guns to come ahead.

"Heavier wagons now, Rider Imp," he directed. "The carts are making it so far. Throw your leather and rear at it."

"Keith's right," Rider Imp tuned up. "I sight those Sioux pony forelocks, too. They'll catch Shoot So Far before you do if they're not stopped up."

"The Gatlings will stop them," growled Bart. "You get across and block the far end of this Crossing first, Rider Imp."

"Where'll I pull up?" Rider Imp asked.

"Right at the basin neck, the Springs mouth, over on that side," Bart outlined his stand. "Hold it. Don't let a pony rider burst through. Use all your artillery, and Ruby Fleury's, too."

Bart grinned a little at the extent of Rider Imp's armament and the capacity of his cartridge belts, although it was more than probable that the Oregon Owl would have use for every bit of it against the Indian enemies who had so named him.

"All right, I'll sure gun them back out of that," exulted Rider Imp, "though I'm telling you I'd a lot sooner ride than drive."

"Not here, this time, Rider Imp," corrected Ruby Fleury, her white fingers tapping his arm emphatically. "I'm quite comfortable, and I'm still seeing Ilo in that fix down there a while ago."

"Hee, Ruby, you a confirmed waggoner, eh?" jeered the Oregon Owl. "Now weren't you the woman who was going to bog this blamed prairie schooner at the first quicksand crossing we came to in Canada and saddle up a pair of wild mustangs to straddle? Well, maybe this epsom salts place is it."

"I'm soundly convinced it will be if you wander off the track," Ruby warned him. "So drive right in those ruts ahead."

Rider Imp lashed down in Paul Hull's wheel impressions, and Constable Chester crooked a finger for the guns to hurry along behind into their mobile positions. The whole combined R C A-Freemen outfits strung across in a tight rear guard for the diverted herds still forging homeward before the white riders' united pressure. The organ roll of the steers' bellowing and the brass shriek of the loose ponies' neighing shook the hill tops; but in spite of their panicky protests the animals were still in hand, and would remain so if the onrush of the Sioux did not reach the dip in time to scatter the leaders.

The Sioux ponies showed shoulders, legs, full silhouettes over the hill crests, as they galloped hard in a dash to surround Shoot So Far. Lying low on their horses' necks or hanging far down from their riding pads, they came in a savage swarm, firing steadily as they approached the crossing so as to stampede

the driven herds back again through the narrow basin exit.

Paul Hull and his Freeman swept the slope with a volley, scattering the foremost Sioux riders from their trail, and pushed the carts off the icy Springs ground onto the gravelly base of a small butte on the plains side of the depression.

The creaking Red River carts were all run safely across, leaving no gap for cattle or horses to be chased through by the Indians.

The more ponderous wagons rumbled in their wake, drivers and guards letting loose another volley.

Rider Imp Burt's canvas-topped vehicle swayed violently after, squelching half frozen muck from the teetering corduroy of slight poles, aiming for his post where he could complete the blockade.

Constable Bart Chester motioned Ilo to follow the prairie schooner closely.

"You and Lily be sure to get across before us," he called to her. "Don't let your dad or Keith wait for me. The Major, the Colonel and I will be the last on this rim."

Major Wade and Colonel Butt eyed the hard-riding Sioux pounding in to beat Rider Imp to the bottleneck of the Springs mouth.

"Will Rider Imp reach it, do you think, sir?" speculated Colonel Butt benignly.

"Rider Imp has sure got to make it," declared Bart, waiting grimly.

"We can help him now," Major Wade announced, wheeling the guns in to close range.

"In a minute," nodded Bart. "Let him get out of line of sight and under elevation. That's a good canvas top on the wagon, and there's a lady on the seat, too, remember."

They watched Rider Imp swing in a curve along the sedge fringes, the marsh hayland and the snow-drifted willow clumps bedded about the last scummed pool near the mouth of the draw he was entering.

"Rider Imp's all right," the Constable decided. "Open up on them."

A pair of cavalrymen jumped to the foremost Gatling pointing over the sink of the Springs at the peaks of the buttes beyond.

"Give them a blast on the rise yonder, will you, Colonel?" Bart requested, recollecting that Butt liked due ceremony. "Major Wade will have the range accurately enough, eh?"

Major Wade snapped his fingers to the gunner squinting at the swaying Sioux.

"Low," he cautioned. "Don't overshoot."

The Gatling barked.

The ice chips flew from the ridge above the basin. Snow spurts dotted the slope. Dust puffed up in advance of the Indian ponies on the bare knolls.

The Sioux, almost within reach of the outer edge of the herds and Shoot So Far himself, gave a wild shout and scattered. Here and there along the slope ponies went down suddenly, taking their hit riders with them, but under cover of the dust the Sioux whisked their wounded away before the smoke and the gravel shower had settled.

"That's the range," commented Major Wade crisply. "Sky-high sights are no good in hill country, although I admit there's no limit on the plains."

Rider Imp pulled into his post in the gap, and the moment he arrived he opened fire on the disorganized band from the farther margin of the basin. Ruby Fleury knelt on the seat beside him, letting loose with her Springfield. Ilo and Lily, too, were shooting as they joined them, their belt guns smoking and jumping high in the air every time they threw down on the checked attackers. Keith and Ted rode right after them, sniping from their saddles and not delaying to pull out any more poles.

"The Sioux don't like that rifle stuff, either," Bart chuckled, his eye gleaming with appreciation as he saw the girls go into action. "Now's your chance, Colonel, Major, to spirit the Gatlings across and catch them from the bottom of those buttes."

"All right," Wade agreed, moving the gunners out with their artillery. "We'll train them on the buttes over there alongside Rider Imp."

Major Wade turned his dappled gray and trailed the Gatlings, sticking scrupulously to the corduroyed strips in the treacherous overflow of the Springs.

"You're crossing with us, of course, Constable Chester," he assumed, as a sort of cautious afterthought.

"Right on your heels and wheels," Bart assured him. "I just want to see that everybody's clear."

The Colonel swerved his big chestnut after Major Wade, and Bart was the only one left on the south

rim of the crossing place.

"I hope you will not run it too close, sir," the Colonel complained politely, speaking over his shoulder and pointing his saber at the commotion on the farther circle of hills.

"Not too close, Colonel Butt," promised Bart.

"Only I'm not overlooking the chance of Shoot So Far risking the scum ice of the pools off this trail-way."

"You think Shoot So Far would risk bogging himself, man and horse, to get around you?" spluttered Colonel Butt in mild surprise. "He knows a rider plunging into the muck bottom below those Springs might never get out alive."

"I know he knows," smiled Bart. "Still, a wily Sioux will risk anything. Don't forget Shoot So Far knows, too, that you'll be taking him back to the U. S. A. and to certain punishment as soon as I get hold of him again."

Colonel Butt rolled his pop-eyes uncertainly, sending his gaze from the noisy buttes to the quiet pools and back once more.

"Of course, sir," he concurred, "but there's no need for you to risk what Shoot So Far risks. I'm not certain, Constable Chester, that any worthless renegade off the reserves either in the United States or Canada is deserving of that honor."

"It all depends," mused Bart, "what road he takes to get free, I guess. Anyway, I've got my eye on him, and I'll start the minute he starts."

The guns ahead rumbled rapidly over the pole-

paved soft spots straight for their new positions where Rider Imp, Ruby and the rest were holding the disconcerted Sioux from advancing. Without the slip of a wheel rim from the marked track or a moment's halt in the drifts that banked the base of the gravelly buttes, the cavalrymen rolled the Gatlings out and nosed them under the rise.

The Northern Major and the Southern Colonel waved to Bart as they left the end of the track and reined in beside the gunners at that distance, a signal that they would fire again.

Bart started Firestep over.

Shoot So Far could delay no longer.

At once the Sioux had to make his choice, take or leave his last open road to escape.

CHAPTER 29

The Ponies Pick the Track

THE reports of the Gatlings on the south side of the Crossing had speeded up the herds, and now as they began firing on the north slope, steers and ponies surged along still faster. The drive passed the point where the Sioux had received their sudden check, and as Bart rode out to join the others around sharp-shooter Rider Imp's covered wagon, not an Indian rider mounted the hill crests. The open space where they had charged a few minutes before was blank except for vagrant swirls of gravel dust and powdery snow drifting by, caused by the pounding of the guns against the butte tops. Then out of the black-and-white mist which half hid Shoot So Far, riding alone, came another band tearing borderward in his direction.

In spite of the dirty haze that smudged the Coteau slope, Bart saw at a glance that these Sioux were not White Cap's men.

Keith Culver and Ted Ross, too, recognized the fresh intruders instantly.

"Tetons—some of them," Keith identified them.

"Yanktons—quite a lot," supplemented Ted Ross.

"They make me homesick, those cussed Injun faces," squealed Rider Imp from the wagon. "They're from Wild Elk's band, 'way down off the Arkansas."

Keith shifted his Henry rifle until its muzzle covered the crazy galloping of Wild Elk's men.

"How'd they make Canada?" he demanded of Bart.

Chester. "With Shoot So Far?"

"No," replied Bart. "They aimed to join Shoot So Far and White Cap's force. I figure this is the meeting."

"Followed me, eh?" deduced Keith.

"Yes, all the way."

"Planning to ambush the outfit?"

"Just that, Keith."

"You seem to savvy a pile of things I don't cotton to, Bart," Keith complained. "There's some funny little riddle in here I don't know the answer to at all. If you'd just go on and solve it like a good hunting pal should do, I'd—"

"You'll know how you were stalked in a minute," prophesied Bart, "judging by the way those Tetons and Yanktons and sundry tribes are running. Look alive. Don't let them break through here. Pull out those poles now so they can't get footing."

Keith and Ted wheeled aside to the last bit of corduroy at the exit of their trail across the basin, casting the poles out and rendering the narrow back pathway as treacherous as at first. While they finished swiftly, Shoot So Far, reared into full sight, yelling at the dispersed band of White Cap's followers to rally round him, but none of them answered his cry. At the flash of the guns, they were riding for escape toward the Cactus Hills slopes. In a moment they disappeared the way their chief disappeared, and Shoot So Far found himself deserted suddenly. Deserted but not daunted, for almost as abruptly as he had been left to shift for himself, he was unex-

pectedly reinforced by the band of Tetons, Yanktons and others emerging at last, after all his own and White Cap's waiting, from the Coreau du Missouri.

Shoot So Far recognized them as quickly as Keith, Ted, Rider Imp, Bart and the rest had done, although he could not distinguish Wild Elk, White Deer, Gray Goose, No Meat or any of the headmen in the plunging group of riders.

"Where are Wild Elk, White Deer, Gray Goose, No Meat?" he shouted at them. "Where are your leaders and why are they so slow?"

They yelled in full stride that they did not know, and never slackened to explain further. Shoot So Far gave them one fierce glance of disappointment and doubt. Help had come to him for the second time, but in another minute it, too, would be gone. After that one hopeful instant of recognition of his friends, he realized that these were not the kind of reinforcements that would do him any good. These Tetons, Yanktons and the other allied Sioux were running, speeding their ponies, intent on escape, bound south of the border whence they had come at his piloting.

Facing about toward that south-of-the-border country where their strained faces turned and their stretched pinto necks pointed, Shoot So Far saw with savage vision a Sioux dream dissolve as it had been dissipated once before in his people's ancient past.

In olden times the Sioux hunting grounds, most spacious of Indian empires, had extended Northwest from Kansas to Canada and from Washington to

Minnesota, and Shoot So Far knew that it was Louis Riel's plan, and White Cap's plan, and Wild Elk's plan to hold the Sun Dance again across the plains and see again the full-blood and the voyageur stand supreme.

Shoot So Far remembered maliciously that it had been a plan long arranged, and Young Kansas Devil, Keith Culver, had only hurried it when his bullet had cut down Flame Eye by the Marsh of Whooping Cranes.

It was a plan, Shoot So Far recollected also, that would have effected the ambush of the R C A-Freemen party and the surprise of Prince Albert had it not been for the speedy intervention of Young Kansas Devil's red-coated Mounted Police friend, Constable Bart Chester.

Shoot So Far was quite aware, as well, that White Cap had not underrated the bronco-breaking Policeman he had told him about. The swift-riding, long-enduring messenger from dead Flame Eye's tribe on the Arkansas River had felt already the weighty grip of Bucking Bart's hand and understood that he had met his match both in strength and in cunning.

As for White Cap's apparent desertion at the critical fighting moment, Shoot So Far, although he resented it bitterly, did not consider it entirely deliberate. Quite likely those soldier Horse Guards the Mounted Policeman had brought from the East had got in between and made up White Cap's wavering mind for him. Maybe White Cap was in as bad a fix as he was himself.

For now the trapper was trapped, and all Shoot So Far's desire for revenge, all his malice of tribal hate, centered on the two white men who had snared him so tightly.

He did not know which one he hated worst. Possibly he hated one as violently as the other because they were such close friends.

Trapped he rode, but not finally beaten, not unescapably arrested—yet. He had lost his rifle. Deprived of it in his first encounter with Bart, he came barehanded behind the routed Tetons and Yanktons, looking for an opportunity to replace it as he rode over the slope where the wounded of White Cap's force had been carried away and some of their weapons had been missed.

Shoot So Far saw one lying in a blood-stained snowbank. He swung low from his pony's side, fingertips scraping the ground, and picked the rifle up while going at full speed. Straightening up and whooping triumphantly, defiantly, he raced for the Springs with the rest of the band.

There was no passage remaining open for their flying horses' hoofs but the overflow pools of the Springs, dotting the basin ice in a treacherous chain, deceptive as muskeg, deadly as quicksand for any heavy body engulfed by accident or miscalculation. Under ordinary conditions no Sioux rider would have chanced it. In ordinary circumstances even their ponies would have shied from it instinctively, sensing the unstable footing as they sensed miry turf in the middle of summer.

Yet they were driven, man and beast, by something that overruled all instinct and reason. Behind and above them boomed the thunder of heavy firing, the spaced volleys on the heights, the rapid, never-ending crackle in the Coteau hollow out of which they had darted in their reckless flight. In a body they reached the basin edge between Rider Imp's position at the gap of the dip and the Coteau ravines, out of range of those guarding the bottle-neck with him.

"Only two moves for them now," commented Rider Imp. "Either they come in range to gamble on our rickety road or they risk their necks where they are."

"Yes, hold your fire a minute," Keith cautioned. "No use wasting ammunition the way they're shuttling."

"Watch you don't hit whoever's chasing them," Bart put in, "or wing any of Lieutenant Bill Merritt's boys in the hills above. Bill's firing is booming close to the Springs. You'll spot the uniforms of the Bodyguards mighty soon."

At the scum ice, the Sioux band from over the line spread widely, but they did not pull up their mounts a second. Instead, they skimmed from gravel to ice in a single stride and, with another wild yell for more speed, took the crossing all together.

Ted Ross, Keith and the others expected them to bog down in their insane breakaway. They looked for a hoof to strike the pools here and there and cut into the half-frosted bed beneath, but the Indians

flew along in a miracle-maze without a man going down. Their mighty medicine was with them, or perhaps blind luck wove their network of trails.

Fed Ross had another theory.

"Ponies," Ted guessed. "They're letting the ponies pick the path. Not reining them so much as a finger's pressure or a leg twitch."

"Did you ever scan the beat of that?" breathed Keith. "They're most over."

In a scattered pattern ice rubble bounced, bottom muck spurted, spring water sprayed about them like winter's frosting on the horizon's pane, so nearly they foed disaster yet somehow missed it.

"They are over," amended Bart Chester. "They've won the boundary, all but Shoot So Far. Here he comes."

The Path to Justice

THE amazing luck of his comrades inspired Shoot So Far with new confidence. Where their ponies had crossed, his pony could cross too. It was surer of foot, deeper gifted with instinct, more experienced on the trails. Besides, the way was better marked now, with the ice grooves of the solid path, the glassy places where water had squirted, the muck holes black-flagged all along with the skid and recovery marks of dirty hoofs jerking out and speeding on to safety.

Shoot So Far gave the pony its head and raced for the center of the overflow, because there many of the twining trails merged in a slightly broader track and so the scum ice appeared sounder.

Bart and Keith knew then that he would not swerve in a swift ruse and try to regain the corduroyed wagon road they had used, but would keep straight through toward his friends already loping up the farther bank of the basin.

Bart wheeled Firestep away from the open end of that road and spurred to head him before he could leave the narrow marginal strip of gravel, but Keith doubted if there was time to make it.

"We watched that Teton-Yankton circus troupe spellbound too long," Keith grinned as he reined River Gleam round after him. "Shoot So Far has a few strides to the good on us."

"Never saw the Sioux I couldn't outride yet," de-

clared Bart. "I had to wait till Lieutenant Bill Merritt's fellows showed. Yonder's a Bodyguard's blur, away up on those crests at last. Bill isn't so laggard as I thought. He'll be on deck, all right, for the finish of this Effervescence Springs drama."

"Watch you don't wet your feet on the stage, Bart," Keith chuckled. "You'll catch cold or get cramps or chilblains or something. If Shoot So Far wants to soak—why, I say to let him soak alone."

Bart pointed to the band now in fresh flight on the firm footing of the distant bank.

"They hurdled it, Keith," he reminded his friend. "They managed the impassable."

"Lighting doesn't strike twice in the same place, and the same run of luck never has a twin," Keith argued merrily. "Shoot So Far can't repeat, so if he's bound to dive under that ice like a muskrat, nobody need trouble to stop him."

"Maybe not, but that isn't his path to justice," Bart contended. "Also, I told him he was arrested, didn't I? Had a hold on his bridle, even. Might say he felt the fingers of the Law. I gave him my word, and I've got to keep it. Remember, the word of the Mounted is always good."

Keith gave in, for their whirlwind dash was not conducive to easy, fluent conversation.

"Oh! have it your way," he capitulated. "Save taking him to Regina Barracks, though. Save Major Wade and Colonel Butt lugging him back to the United States and babying him home to his reserve. You seem to forget, Bart, what Shoot So Far rode

north for—the express purpose of laying me out.”

“He will lay you out yet, if you don’t keep your head low,” Bart told him severely. “He’s loading that nice new rifle he picked out of the drifts.”

Since he had given his pony its own shrewd will, Shoot So Far had both hands free to knock the snow out of the rifle muzzle and action, and to jam fresh cartridges into the magazine while he rode at a terrific speed. Bart and Keith were coming swiftly at an angle, cutting down the range as Shoot So Far began firing, but they stuck to the sedge line and the old marsh hay cover, and made elusive, rapid-running targets. The Sioux’s bullets went high and behind, or else glanced short from the gravel of the hill bases immediately in front of them. Every time he pulled trigger, Shoot So Far yelled his defiance. He had the lead and a splendid chance of eluding the Mounted man, and if in escape he could even the score with the killer of Flame Eye, he would carry great honor over the United States boundary.

“Young Kansas Devil,” he shouted at Keith, ducking through the dry, frozen water-growth like a phantom hunter. “Those who run could not kill you. White Cap’s men could not kill you. But I, Shoot So Far, can kill you, and Flame Eye will be avenged.”

The whine of his incessant bullets and his militant screeching irritated Keith so that he shoved his Henry rifle through a clump of reeds and took aim for a finish shot at the galloping Sioux, but Bart, reaching from the saddle, pushed Keith’s barrel down.

“Don’t want a dead prisoner, Keith,” he objected.

"Spoil everything if you plug him. It'll hush up the Sioux defeat and weaken the moral effect of his capture. Must put him and White Cap on trial in two different countries—Shoot So Far in the U. S. A., White Cap in Canada. Parade their punishment, and that'll settle the resurrected Sioux empire business."

Keith was a little angry, anxious to make Shoot So Far eat his words and bite his tongue.

"Let me get one crack at him and you won't need all that red tape and Government seals," he growled. "Anyway, it's my private feud first and legalities afterwards. Don't know that you got any call to order me, Bart. I'm not sworn in as a Mounted scout just yet, am I?"

"You soon will be," Bart laughed, "and you accepted technically when you wired an affirmative answer to Bob Armstrong's telegram."

They rushed along, almost at the gravel, crashing noisily through a bed of dried bulrushes, knocking out a cloud of cottony plumes that swept exasperatingly on the wind into Shoot So Far's eyes and made him miss his moving mark still, although the range was much decreased as both pursuers and pursued reached the marginal tracks of the band in their recent take-off.

"Hold on, Shoot So Far," Bart thundered. "It's suicide where you're going, and we can keel you out of your saddle any minute we like."

Shoot So Far replied with another ball that whistled between Bart and Keith.

"Sneaking Redcoat," he howled. "I will kill you,

too. White Cap was afraid of the Police. I am not afraid of the Police. I will shoot you and Young Kansas Devil both and get away with my brothers to the Arkansas. There in the big Marsh of Whooping Cranes neither Redcoats nor Bluecoats with their Long Knives will find us. Yes, and you cannot wheel your honking guns that shoot so fast there. You cannot wheel them on the water as you do here on the snow."

He fired again as they burst out of the rushes into the most dangerous zone of the open gravel, spread thinly between the ice-line and the hummocked hill spurs. Keith felt the wind of the missile directly in front of his nose, and he could stand the role of moving, living target no longer.

"It's sure suicide where we're going, too, Bart," he rasped. "Let me blaze at him, just once, can't you, and I'll—"

Keith whipped forward his weapon. There was no obstruction of hay stalk, sedge blade or reed plume in front of the Henry's fine sights on the bare bank.

"Don't fire, Keith," bellowed Bart. "I'll grab him next snort of a pony. Don't you go and drill him point-blank."

"I'm only going to rock him off his sawhorse," Keith compromised. "Loosen up his girth a bit, the consarned, impudent cuss."

Keith fired low as he spoke, aiming at the saddle girth of Shoot So Far's pony just above the stirrup. His ball passed between the foot in the stirrup and the pony's belly, nipping Shoot So Far's calf, creasing

the mount's flank slightly and cutting the leather girth in two as neatly as a skinning knife could have done.

Shoot So Far had his rifle butt to his shoulder in the act of firing once more, and his body was rather off-balance in an awkward pose. He went off his horse backwards, saddle and all, and he did not land as he generally was able to do when unhorsed, like a cat upon his moose-skin feet. Instead he thumped heavily on the gravel, the rifle jarred out of his hands, leaving him weaponless for the second time.

The rifle skidded out onto the ice while he jumped erect like a bouncing ball the moment he struck the ground. It was in his mind to mount again instantly in the Sioux trick, that he could perform better than most Indian horsemen, and straddle his pony in a single leap off the earth. Yet when he turned, his mount was not there for his vault, which would have put him on nearly equal terms again with Bart and Keith. As Keith's hot lead seared against its hide, the horse had reared aside. Alarmed by the charge of Bart's Firestep and Keith's River Gleam towering over him, and spurred by the stinging in his flank, he forgot his training, that should have held him by his fallen master, and dashed for the hills.

Shoot So Far's courage did not desert him even then. His rifle lost, his horse bolting, he would not give in. He faced swiftly about and ran out on the ice-trail of the riders between the lurking pools.

It was possible that he might be much safer on foot than on the pony's back while in the act of

attempting the crossing; and once on the other bank, he could ride double with one of his friends till they found a lucky chance to pick up another horse on the trail.

CHAPTER 31

Through the Rim Ice

It was only at this moment, too, that Bart and Keith suddenly realized a man weighed less than a horse and might risk the scum ice of the pools with more impunity.

"Confound him," snarled Keith, "now he's sprinting for it like an antelope."

"Dismount," Bart yelled.

He leaped off, slapping his trailing reins to the ground, tying Firestep there only psychologically.

Keith jumped out of his saddle at the same time, never bothering about reins or arresting the pony in any way except verbally, for River Gleam would stand at a word.

From either side they rushed at Shoot So Far. The Sioux's rifle lay in Keith's path as he dashed after him, and he toed it back out of the way in passing in order to be rid of that complication. Shoot So Far, running like a rabbit, could double and retrieve it if he found himself being overtaken, and Keith wanted no more of that long gun's talk. It shot too straight, and Shoot So Far, although a Sioux, was too good a marksman for his liking.

Whether pursuit on his right and left disconcerted him, or whether the thundering horses had cracked the precarious ice ahead, they could not tell, but as they closed on him, Shoot So Far abruptly pivoted with a slip and slide. In a stride he changed his course, quitting the straight-through path and describing a

short arc toward the middle section of the road the wagons had negotiated. The bridging poles had been pulled out of the north end, but there remained still a few layers in the worst spots in the center, and the south end ascended the solid incline of the dip.

If he could set his moccasins on that trailway, he would be able to run far faster and the danger of being mired would be practically eliminated. The only drawback was that there showed not a single hoofmark between him and the road, nothing to differentiate the safe ice from the shell of the muck beds. None of the other Sioux ponies had gone in this direction, and the fact that such a possible exit from the flat basin surface had been totally avoided by the horses in flight might indicate that they had circumvented it by instinct.

However, Shoot So Far had little time for a choice of evils, and he raced unhesitatingly over the untried expanse, with Bart and Keith pounding after him precisely in his firm tracks. He held his lead in spite of their challenging spurt, nearing the road poles midway in the half-congealed morass. It looked as if he were going to make it with something to spare. All his tracks were firm. No water geysered. No mud spumed. Then without warning he dropped through a scummed pool up to his armpits, almost within reach of the ends of half a dozen tepee poles bedded in a sunken wheel rut on the wagon road itself.

The spray fanned up around him like a frost flower. The mire mushroomed the rim of the black hole like ink out of a gigantic bottle mouth as he

struggled to catch the butts of the poles and sank back again at every violent lunge.

"Run, Keith, run ashore," Bart cried out. "Throw the end-bridge of poles in again and get out to the middle that way. I'll hold him up."

"You mean you'll duck in with him," snapped Keith. "No sense in Shoot So Far pulling you down. Come on—we'll shove him out a pole off the roadway."

Bart had not stopped or slowed his pace. He was sliding close to the bogged Sioux.

"Go on," he ordered. "I've got him. Do it thundering quick, Keith."

Bart was at the edge of the hole, grabbing Shoot So Far by the shoulders, supporting him, as the Indian's plunging panic threatened not only to smother him but to sink him inextricably in final defeat of the law.

Keith whirled on the slippery skin of the ridged pool rings, where they had bubbled over and frozen, bubbled and frozen repeatedly till they shimmered like windows of stained and corrugated glass. He darted wildly ashore, ranting out loud at every lanky step about Constable Bart Chester, who ought to have just as much plain horse sense as comrade Bart Chester of the hunting grounds and the far overland traverses.

"Stubborn old pride of the Mounted," he fumed. "Got to produce his prisoner even if it's a mummy and he goes into darkest Egypt for him."

He ran desperately, for he was grimly afraid that

Bart might be dragged in or break open a second hole before he could cross half the railway's winding route and shift some of the corduroy to the Constable and Shoot So Far struggling there.

There was little time to make such a circuitous rescue, but as he came out on the northern road end, his thumping heart and his laboring lungs were buoyed up pleasantly all in an instant by the sight of Ted Ross and Ilo rushing to help.

At the crash of shell ice which left Shoot So Far engulfed, Ilo and her father had leaped down from their horses and seized the poles that had been tossed out of the ruts at that point. As quickly as Bart, Ilo saw that aid had to come from the center section of the roadway.

"Bart's going after him, Dad," Ilo cried. "We've got to climb out yonder mighty pronto."

"Yes, bang the old culvert back in place," nodded her father. "There—that's footing enough for us. I'll push out ahead, Ilo."

"No, Dad, let me go first," she begged. "I'm a lot lighter than you, and it'll be easier for me to scramble about the edge of yon ice hole over there."

She wormed past him in spite of his protests and ran lithely down the trailway to the middle of the basin, her father stumbling close after her and still grumbling his admonitions.

"Don't want three in there, mind, Ilo," he cautioned her. "Too much weight on that rim ice and the whole caboodle will collapse."

"I'll make it, Dad," Ilo assured him. "I'm light."

You handle the poles for my feet. Here's Keith coming to lend you a hand."

Keith yelped with delight at the celebrity with which they whipped the end-bridge into its former marks in the road. His boots thumped down on it, and the tremendous difference between his efforts to speed on the slippery ice and to hurry across the corduroyed spots seemed to give him back his wind almost immediately.

"A sight for sore eyes, Ilo," he panted, acknowledging their prompt help with the culvert. "Great work, Ted. Honest, I couldn't have lifted a match to my pipe just then. Now I feel better. Let me—"

"No, I'm first, Keith," Ilo stopped him in turn.

"You looking for an ice water bath, Ilo? Sea salt or Epsom Salts and everything thrown in?"

"Not me, Keith," she laughed, although her laugh had the quaver of excitement and the tension of fear that they might be too late. "I'm a featherweight, as I reiterated several times to Dad. You two are pretty ponderous compared to a girl."

She proved her contention instantly as her father and Keith seized a couple of the stoutest tepee poles and poked them toward Bart, who was half crouching, half kneeling over his kicking, flailing prisoner as the Sioux tried blindly to get a grip on the pole ends.

While she inched out on the poles to reach a hand to the struggling pair, more help was coming behind them from the gap.

Now that there was no need of the bottleneck there being corked any longer, Rider Imp Burt backed his

prairie schooner out of its position of blockade and down the slant to the culvert.

"Handle the lines, Ruby," they heard him yell to his companion. "I'll run them a rope, or they'll sure never yank the Constable and the Injun out of that confounded mess together."

"All right, Rider Imp, I'll haul when you sing out to me," promised Ruby, relinquishing at last her Springfield for the reins and whip. "Give a yippee or two."

Rider Imp knotted one end of his long rope to the rear axle of the covered wagon and advanced at a funny trot toward the group bunched precariously in the narrow roadway ahead of him.

He saw that Ilo had climbed out to the very tip of the poles but still could not quite touch the men with her extended hand.

"Got any slack?" she cried anxiously to her father and Keith.

"Give you a foot," decided Keith cautiously, his eye measuring accurately all the butt anchorage that was left on the poles.

"But be danged careful with that extra foot, Ilo," Ted Ross warned her in extreme uneasiness.

They slid her slowly, grudgingly forward, poles and all, on the rim ice that buckled perilously. She touched the mired Shoot So Far's waving fingers finally, and another couple of inches put her in reach of Bart.

As she gripped Bart, with a strength that was a good deal more than a featherweight's power, Rider

Imp arrived at the finish of his funny trot, trailing the loose rope end. In spite of the gravity of the spectacle beyond the road shoulder upon which he stood, the driver of the covered wagon saw something in the odd sight that tickled him.

"Tee-hee!" he cackled. "Who you rescuing, Ilo? Bart or the Injun?"

CHAPTER 32

In the Lariat's Loop

FOR, as Bart had the Indian round the shoulders, so had Ilo a hold upon the Constable's neck. Her strong young hands had fastened where she could best get an instant grip, and she had given no thought whatever, in the life-and-death demands of the moment, to the intimacy of her attitude.

She turned her face at Rider Imp's call, and they saw a blush redden her cheeks, which an unaccustomed pallor of nervous haste and intense anxiety had left strangely white and rigid while she climbed out on the ice to reach Bart.

Her cousin Keith noted the blush and knew it was a good tonic for her overstrained nerves. He took up Rider Imp's cue, quick to divert her mind from the possible imminence of a slip and disaster.

"Yes, Ilo, you were talking ring jargon about featherweights and heavyweights and such," Keith bantered lightly, although he was shaking with doubt or something that was more than the reaction of his recent run himself. "This picnic by the Effervescence Springs looks more like a wrestling match—catch-as-catch-can style."

"You referee, Keith?" Ilo sent back, matching his mood, for she knew he always had his joke even in his own predicaments of gravest peril.

"Or parson, maybe," put in Rider Imp facetiously, as he deftly knotted his rope round one of the pole butts and passed the loop to Ted Ross for the hitch

on the other. "Might be a love clasp, eh, Ilo? Tee-hee-hee!"

Ilo blushed some more. Literally in her arms, Bart was jerking his heart out trying to loosen Shoot So Far and draw him out on the edge of the hole. His face was red, too, the rush of blood to his lowered head under the strain suffusing his eyes, drumming in his ears. Dimly he heard the sounds of the movements of the others like distant thunder, merely muttering in echoed reverberations over the hollow ice, or like a covered wagon rumbling far away. He thought Keith must have reached the indicated spot where he had sent him, and he imagined also that others had joined him, judging by the growing volume of the commotion in the ice shell under his braced feet.

Yet when he felt the grip on his shoulders, he realized the arms were too slim for Keith's, the hands too soft and graceful. The perfume of a woman's hair, the moist warmth of a woman's breath, the fragrance of woman's presence, too, came with the grip, clinging halo-like round his head. He stared up through the mist of frosty spray and the shower of black bubbles and glimpsed the girl, more golden than ever, more beautiful, her eyes shining, her cheeks blooming with a glow which even his harassed mind reasoned was not due entirely to vigorous effort or tense excitement.

"Ilo, I—I figured it was Keith," he gurgled. "I told him to run and—"

"Sooner have Keith, would you, Constable—I mean

Bart?" she suggested smoothly, sweetly. "Not a good fix to change places in, but if you insist, maybe I can manage to crawl aside so as to—"

It was Bart's turn to interrupt hastily.

"No, no, I wasn't ordering you away," he protested hotly. "Nothing like that. Though, honestly, you shouldn't be in here. Why on earth did you come in, Ilo? Tell me that."

"You came for me, didn't you, into the stampede, a bit ago?" she reminded him. "We always play fair in the West, remember."

"Meaning?"

"I just had to try to even the score—if I ever could do that, Bart."

"I hope you don't, Ilo," Bart smiled, happy in the midst of his strain. "I certainly wish you won't ever. You see, I want you to keep on trying hard—always."

"You're talking nonsense, Bart," Ilo chided with a thrill, "skating on thin ice like that."

"I mean it, Ilo—every word. We're going to have some mighty busy Rebellion days ahead. We won't have much time, maybe, to think or to talk about ourselves. But do you calculate you could keep on trying, like I said?"

"Well, of course, it's really my duty, come to figure on it," she teased.

"Easy duty?"

"Sort of."

"You're wonderful, Ilo, We'll leave it at that, till we get out."

"We're not getting out very fast; I guess they're complaining behind us," she laughed softly, every vestige of fear and thought of failure driven out of her heart by that marvelous thrill pulsing through her veins. "I can see out of the tail of my eye that Dad's waving wildly back there. Rider Imp's got a rope on our poles, too, thank Heaven, and Keith—shucks! Keith's just plain laughing at us."

"He's jealous, Ilo," explained Bart. "Jealous as thunder because you took his job over."

"I haven't finished it yet, confound him," Ilo sighed in strange ecstasy. "Can you heave yourself backwards onto these poles while I pull?"

Bart had been trying, but he attempted it again as Ilo dragged more strongly than ever.

"Can't manage it," he gritted, "unless I drop Shoot So Far. If I drop him, he's sure a goner slapping round like that. A lot of people talk about Indians being stoic."

Ilo's quirt was still dangling at her wrist, where she had looped it in the wild moments of her struggle in the stampede against the crowding horde of steers. Loosing one arm from Bart's shoulders, she slipped the wrist loop off.

"Wait, Bart," she advised, "till I snap my lash round his elbows, and I can hold him while you make your own move."

Ilo swiftly flicked her whip with the same skill and certainty which she had displayed before in disarming Colonel Butt when her cousin Keith had clashed with the Army officers on the Culver home-

stead over the commandeering of the R C A stock.

Her lash writhed out snake-like through the air and wound about Shoot So Far's arms below the biceps. She drew it taut, pinching his buckskin sleeves in deep ridges and crinkling the leather. The floundering Sioux could not flail much now. Ilo took a turn of the flexible quirt around a snag on the pole. Holding tightly, she gave the Constable the word to straighten up and change his hold.

"Pronto, Bart," Ilo breathed, "a quick shift. I've got him snug."

Bart momentarily let go of his prisoner, grasped the pole ends gingerly and swung off the rim ice onto a firmer perch beside her.

"Great aim, Ilo," he lauded. "Hold hard, just a burning minute."

He leaned forward, the long stretch bringing a welcome sense of relief to his cramped back muscles, and gripped Shoot So Far's hands. The hands were beating no longer. Instead, forced together by the binding pressure of Ilo's riding whip, they remained as if clasped, perhaps in the invocations of his tribe.

Bart and Ilo both were pulling then, Bart with his strong hand-grip, Ilo with the tough rawhide, and they were having some difficulty balancing themselves on the poles when Keith's congratulatory yell echoed like a war-whoop over the pools.

"Got him sure, slick as a seal," Keith exulted. "Hold like blazes. I'll give you a brace in a second—Look out, there!"

Keith reached back for Ted Ross' lariat, which

Ted had grabbed from Lion's saddle horn as he leaped off the horse and ran out on the roadway. Twirling, Keith made a rapid cast. The rope loop settled over the heads of his cousin and the Constable and closed tightly around their shoulders.

"Ringed you fair, eh?" Keith laughed, as the lasso tightened their teetering one-armed clutch on each other, as they balanced like toe dancers on a meager stretch of stage.

"Wedding ring, maybe," chuckled Rider Imp Burt with his funny-tee-hee.

"Lean into it," Keith warned them. "I'll hold you steady when Rider Imp starts the poles out."

Ilo and Bart braced their bodies in the loop, and Keith held taut as a guy wire on the rope.

"All right," nodded Ilo's father, still uneasy, while he eased the pole butts up a foot. "Ready for the pull, Rider Imp, and make it without a snag, too!"

Rider Imp waved an imperious hand to Ruby Fleury on the seat of the prairie schooner ashore.

"Yippee! Ruby," he screeched, "yank your old oxen ahead and never stop."

Paul Hull and Lily Levis, shepherding the Red River cart people, had rushed back to the gap to lend their assistance also when they saw that Ruby was handling the covered wagon by herself.

The Captain of the Freeman grasped the bridles of the gray leaders.

"I'll lead them—fast, Ruby," Paul offered. "You push your wheelers."

Lily Levis promptly ranged herself beside the

black pair of wheel horses.

"Toss me the whip, Ruby," Lily begged. "You have your hands full with the lines."

Ruby dropped it to her.

"Just crack it, Lily," Ruby admonished, shaking out her lines. "Don't touch the wheelers with the lash. Keith's black team will bolt if you do."

CHAPTER 33

Right-Captive

PAUL HULL tugged on the bridles of the gray lead team belonging to Ted Ross, and the covered wagon took a run at the bank. Ruby up high cleverly manipulating her lines, Lily down low cracking the whip in the air alongside the spirited blacks.

The haul-rope tightened on the rear axle and smacked the icy roadway with a resounding slap, then strained straight as a red while the weight of the heavy pull came on.

At the other end of the rope, the twin butts of the poles slid forward with a jerk. Ted Ross and Rider Imp Burt heaved on the knots, adding their manpower to the strength of the four horse hitch in one strong, swift drag. Keith helped with a shrewd draw on his lariat, taking up the slack evenly, surely, in a faultless maintenance of Bart's and Ilo's perfect balance.

Bart and Ilo felt the tug commence all at once and rapidly accelerate.

"Out we go, Ilo," Bart cautioned her, now that the pinch had come.

"Glad of it," breathed Ilo. "My arms feel like they're pulling out of their sockets."

Bart's clenched fingers were cracking, too, with the torture of the jerk, but he hunched his powerful shoulders in the lasso loop and hung on grimly to Shoot So Far's fists.

"Stick to it," he grunted. "Something's got to give."

in a jiffy."

Yet Shoot So Far was so soundly glued in the mire that for a moment he did not budge at all. In that gruelling last instant of his solid anchorage there, Ilo and Bart would have stood in danger of toppling from their position had it not been for Keith's lariat which was their safety belt.

Then the Sioux's feet, leaden as a diver's, were plucked loose in a flash. He came up abruptly, bodily, with surprising swiftness after the stubborn delay, smearing the ice with his sudden plunge across it on his back, his lash-pinioned arms extended over his head, like a bagged deer drawn by hunters on the crusted snow.

"With a plop and a chuck," grunted Bart. "Hold steady still, Ilo."

"You sure had your luck with you that time, Bart," Ilo rejoiced in a voice carrying the soft timbre of a little prayer of thanks. "Luck of the Mounted."

"Good luck symbol close to my heart," whispered Bart just as softly. "How could I lose? We're sliding for shore all smooth enough now, Ilo."

"Wrong prisoner again this time, haven't you?" she plagued him laughingly.

"Maybe," Bart admitted, thrilling to the swiftness of his glide with her across the roadway on the ice and up the slanting bank. "Wrong prisoner perhaps, Ilo, but right captive."

Ahead, on the slope of the dip, Ted Ross, Keith and Rider Imp looked round to see if they were clear of the pools. The white line between Shoot So Far's

heels and the Effervescence Springs edge advertised the fact that the dragging Sioux was finally on dry land.

Rider Imp flourished his dented gray sombrero at the prairie schooner farther along, by the length of the haul rope, upon the rim.

"Whoa—Ruby!" he squeaked. "Brake and all, will you? Steady, whoa! That's it. Yippee!"

Ruby Fleury leaned back with the lines on her seat, sawing sharply.

Paul Hull bore down on the lead team's bits as they reared and stopped in their tracks.

The instant they halted, Ted and Keith cast off the pole knots of the hemp and Rider Imp slipped his wagon axle loop.

While they made their lightning flicks of the rope strands, and Keith eased his lariat, Ilo and the Constable stepped out of the loop. With a deft reverse cut, the girl disengaged her whip lash from Shoot So Far's elbows as surely as she had whirled it on, and returned it to her wrist.

Bart drew Shoot So Far to his feet. All the fight was out of the Sioux. Nearly all the life was out of him, too.

"I am thrown away," he sighed, shivering wearily in his captor's hands.

"You're all right, Shoot So Far," the Constable told him. "You ought to be glad of it. I think it was Ilo, here, Golden Girl, who really pulled you out and saved your life."

Shoot So Far turned his face to her, a gleam like

a flash of gratitude sparkling in his cold, dark, half-closed eyes.

"Golden Girl, yes—she is as golden as the bright sun upon the flowers of the prairie," the Sioux paid her tribute.

Bart kicked the tepee poles they had ridden out toward Keith Culver.

"Light a fire, Keith, you trick roper," he begged merrily. "I'll stand him against the blaze and strip his wet clothes off. He'll sure freeze in that mud pack he has all over him."

Keith jumped to smash up the firewood and to start the flames crackling and leaping by the icy hollow of the basin.

"No hard feelings, Shoot So Far," Keith grinned.

Bart worked fast, for he had gone through ice himself in winter more than once, and knew that the most dangerous point of immersion came immediately on emerging into the freezing drive of the wind. He peeled the stiffening shell of Shoot So Far's garments off under the screen of the smoke and dressed him in some dry clothes that Keith brought out of the covered wagon.

"You'll feel better now, Shoot So Far," Keith comforted him.

Above them, on the plains side, the drive of cattle and horses had cleared the buttes. From the edge of the prairie, sweeping flat towards the Double C Ranch, the riders with Chester Senior, Moffatt and Larry Walters looked down on them and waved for the wagon to keep rolling right along.

"Everything's wide open now, Bartley," Mortimer Chester called to his red-coated son.

"Come a-running," yelled Moffatt.

"Danged Sioux warpathiers got all the war they want this time," Larry Walters shouted, as he pointed repeatedly to something he saw in the hills from his higher vantage point of the plateau.

Those by the blazing fire stared up where Larry Walters was stabbing his mobile telegrapher's fingers at the landscape.

The rapid fire of the Gatling guns had stopped, for there was no target left upon the slopes. Every Sioux had disappeared from the hill crests, and with the cease fire signal Major Wade and Colonel Butt turned their dappled gray and big chestnut horses and cantered back to the fire.

"I heard, Constable Chester, that the Northwest Mounted always get their man," Major Wade congratulated him. "Now I really believe it."

"And sometimes their woman," smiled Colonel Butt gallantly, his benign features creased with sly southern humor. "I admire your Mounted tenacity, sir."

"I'll lead him on up to Regina Barracks," laughed Bart. "Shoot So Far's misdeeds belong to the U. S. A., so you can get him there when you're ready to take him back with you."

"We'll take him back," promised Colonel Butt, "when we return from Batoche."

"Yes, we'll take him home with Diamond-Thumb Jerome Platte and Whispering Cree as soon as you

lay your hands on them, Constable Chester," nodded Major Wade with crisp resolve.

Bucking Bart chuckled guardedly at their eagerness and their faith in the Mounted Police.

"You'll get them in the end," he prophesied, "but I'm not making any promises of quick delivery. Diamond-Thumb and Whispering Cree are a shade elusive, and I don't mind telling you Batoche will be a tough nut to crack. Now I wonder what luck Lieutenant Bill Merritt has had with White Cap?"

"Larry Walters seems to know," Ilo told him. "Larry's still pointing. Ticking off some Morse code message in the air yonder."

They watched Larry, who seemed all elated at whatever sight he glimpsed upon the hill-line beyond the massed herds of the orderly, moving drive.

There, some distance above Walters, where the Governor General's Bodyguards had intercepted White Cap's force, the firing was booming out heavier still; but suddenly, as if at the Gatling guns' cessation, the shooting quit and the silence that fell foretold something significant.

Farther into the Cactus Hills spurs, the reports in that section spattered the new silence intermittently, indicating that this volleying, too, might die out abruptly at any moment.

They waited a minute or two, gazing expectantly while the dust of the riddled graveled ridges settled in the strange calm that followed the fading out of so many mingling echoes. In twos and threes and larger squads, horsemen came loping over the skyline.

The waiting group made out the uniforms of the G. G. B. G. and the costumes of Indians, and the Indians were riding between the guarding whites.

"Prisoners," announced Ted Ross quickly.

"More Sioux—peaceable," Rider Imp supplemented.

Keith Culver grinned again at Shoot So Far.

"You'll have company, Shoot So Far," Keith cheered him. "The Canadian Cavalry have captured White Cap up yonder, too."

CHAPTER 34

Hostage of the Saskatoon Trail

THE fire and dry clothes had warmed Shoot So Far wonderfully, but these did not heat his blood like the sight of White Cap riding behind Lieutenant Merritt in charge of a couple of Horse Guards.

Weak as he still was, the Teton Sioux from the Arkansas bristled like a porcupine and squirmed round Constable Chester in his effort to lash out at White Cap with bitter words. He broke into a stinging tirade in the Sioux tongue, reproaching his late ally with lack of cooperation, outright desertion, absolute cowardice at the critical moment.

"You are no leader and no friend of the Tetons any longer," Shoot So Far accused him, while Bart Chester held him back from a physical clash with his official hand of the law.

"I'd let him loose a spell, Bart," Keith suggested mischievously. "Ugly and all as he's been hound-dogging after me way up here, I wouldn't mind seeing him take a crack at White Cap just to square things. If they fight it out, maybe Lieutenant Merritt won't have any prisoner to bother with, or you won't either."

"I don't doubt that a bit, Keith," observed Bart drily, as he hung on all the harder to his jerking, vociferous captive.

"You are a woman," Shoot So Far was abusing White Cap. "Your courage is the courage of a gopher which runs underground. Why do you give

up the spoil of cattle and horses? Why do you turn your face and change your battle plans at the sight of some soldiers on the plains?"

"I cannot fight my friends, Shoot So Far," explained White Cap with dignity. "Constable Chester who holds you has been my friend. He has bought my horses for himself and other policemen to ride."

Bart grinned at White Cap's sudden declaration of loyalty to the Mounted.

"That why you were running off some more horses, White Cap?" he asked. "To sell them back to me? Funny fix you've got yourself into with those Bodyguards riding your own fast ponies from your own reserve and running you into the earth."

White Cap had no answer for that as his custodians brought him forward at Lieutenant Merritt's nod of direction.

"White Cap is a chief, Bart," the Lieutenant laughed, "and a chief does not forget his tribe and think of private feuds at this time. Besides, he is not only a prisoner but a hostage as well for the return of his men to their reserve and for their good behavior there from now on. At least, that's his promise, I gather, although the interpretation of his talk wasn't very good, my boys being slightly unfamiliar with the Sioux speech and Indian sign-language."

Bart smiled genially at the boys while his eye of appraisal ran over the stalwart line of horsemen who had proved their mettle so quickly in the new and entirely strange land of the Northwest.

"I can't criticize them for that, Bill," he observed

with great satisfaction, "seeing that it's their first time out in Sioux country. I sure congratulate them and their commander."

"Thanks, Bart," beamed the Lieutenant.

"Sort of a record, I'd call it," mused Keith Culver, "bagging the mighty medicine man first trip out of the East."

Shoot So Far, who was good on sign talk and had some skill as an interpreter himself, grimaced disgustedly and quit struggling in the Constable's clutch. His grimace was like a sneer at White Cap, which bit deeper than his words of denunciation.

"White Cap's is trick medicine," he belittled the chief. "He is nothing but a horse trader, and his ambition is business on the farm and the ranch. Nobody now will ever call him out to lead a great cause."

Shoot So Far turned his back on White Cap with a gesture as if he were casting him out of his mind forever, and the signal seemed to indicate also the Sioux chief's complete dismissal from public esteem.

"That settles it, Bill," Bart remarked seriously. "It is the Indian decision, and not vacillating for once."

"You're right, Bart," agreed Merritt. "So if you'll attend to the legal proceedings at your Regina Barracks, I'll rest these famous ponies and these equally famous Bodyguards before herding all those red fellows back to their Saskatoon reserve."

"You'd better do it yourself, Bill, and nose into the orderly room," the Constable advised him. "Because orders are coming through that the Mounted link up with the military and consider themselves

under General Middleton's single command. I don't want to step on any soldier's toes, you understand."

Lieutenant Merritt realized what Bart was driving at, and he accepted his shrewd hint.

"Have it your way, Bart," he agreed.

"Going Barracks-ward now?" inquired the Constable, as he started Shoot So Far moving ahead of him toward the string of wagons and carts.

"Later," the Lieutenant decided. "It's a good spot to camp, and I'll hold the Hills where we chased the braves off. When the men have eaten, slept and rested up, we'll be ready for the Saskatoon Trail."

While he prodded Shoot So Far into action, Bart watched the campfires and the tepee fires spring up all round in the chosen hollows of the Hills and stared at the many smokes spiraling around the crests where, not many minutes before, Gatling guns had been blazing, pock-marking the eternal profiles of those ancient buttes upon the skyline. Shoot So Far viewed the scene too, reluctantly dragging his limbs along as if it were a hard tug to pull himself away from that immense Saskatchewan Valley beyond, that Valley which so nearly had been his and White Cap's and Wild Elk's and all their followers'.

"Keep legging it, Shoot So Far," Bart urged him. "I'd hoist you onto a wagon, after all you've been through, only you'd chill. Get your circulation up now you're out of your bath."

Ilo Ross looked at Shoot So Far heading for jail and subsequent return to the United States reserves of the Sioux, and there was a sudden pity in her eyes

as her glance passed on to Bart Chester. For at that moment she did not see the open plain, the Dirt Hills and Cactus Hills, the soldiers' camp upon the spurs, the basin of the Effervescence Springs, the Côteau looming with gun smoke still drifting over the butte crests. She saw instead the valley of the Arkansas, the Rainbow Fork Trail up which she had come to the Missouri, the R. C. A. Range back home with the Ross, Culver and Armstrong ranch houses and the Marsh of Whooping Cranes beyond.

For that vast Southwest was Shoot So Far's own country as well as hers, and it was not his fault that he was impelled to ride out of it and answer when called Northwest in a different way.

Nor was it Shoot So Far's fault that her summons had been fortunate, while his had led to misfortune. It was like the migrant wings she had watched that day Keith and Flame Eye had met by the swamp shallows, when swans, cranes, ducks, geese and other wildfowl had taken to the air at the spiteful crack of their rifles in momentous combat. She envisioned the Kansas sky once more, filled with those startled wings. Their passage was almost human. Some would make it safely, find sanctuary and nesting shores in the North. Other pinions might fold in mid-flight, struck down by hunters' guns, storm blasts or attacks from taloned enemies in the clouds above or four-footed prowlers on the earth below along the mighty traverse.

"Just out of luck, that's all, Shoot So Far," Ilo sympathized with him, as he stalked faster once his cramped muscles began to unlimber.

"So, Golden Girl," answered Shoot So Far without malice, "I go home again, riding slowly. But you and Singing Nurse, where do you go?"

"We go a long trail yet," she assured him.

"Far as the birds of spring?" the Sioux ventured to inquire symbolically.

"Maybe, Shoot So Far."

"Well, Golden Girl, they come, leading the way. You follow their wings."

Shoot So Far pointed skyward. His Indian ears had heard the bird call before any of the others.

Up there high in the zenith, far to the south as yet, dim as specks in the distance, soared the first stragglers of the migrants over the border—the duck wedges, the arrowheads of geese, the phalanxes of the lordly swans. Bird voices were audible before the beat of pinions could be detected—that magic note which Shoot So Far had caught and instantly interpreted. The quacking gabble, honking cries of leaders, pipe-organ trumpeting that only the swans could peal mingled in faint, elusive music, lost chords sounding and dying, as if muted by the clouds. They spread an ethereal web of color across the landscape—emerald, purple, mauve, buff, golden, in a rainbow band that arched the Basin and, curving earthward, touched the Springs themselves with its legendary foot.

By the unfrozen outlets they pointed down to rest and to feed, covering the rim ice and the overflow pools and hiding in a feathered screen the slimy black hole where Shoot So Far had plunged.

"That means open water somewhere North," observed Keith Culver, staring at the Canadas, the

white geese, gray wavies, black brant, the blues, all arriving among the lesser ducks, cranes and swans.

"Yes, and we'd better be seeking it, too," advised Bart Chester, "before the big rivers and main trails break up for spring."

"Suits me fine," declared Keith gleefully, thrilling as much as Ilo to the sight of those birds from home. "So what are we waiting for?"

"More visitors—not feathered." Bart smiled, pointing past the flocks. "Here they come."

Keith gazed sharply where the Constable slanted his gloved forefinger toward the dissipating mist of powder vapor over the Coteau edge. Only then did he become acutely aware of the cessation of sound in that direction. He realized that the intermittent firing had lapsed for good and that no more sporadic outbursts would flare up unexpectedly when he imagined the crackling of six-guns was all over.

Keith's curiosity was more intense than ever, and the suspicious tone of his voice more pronounced.

"Visitors," he echoed with a bewildered smile. "Your calling day, today, Bart?"

"Must be," declared Bart, holding in a hearty laugh. "Seen a lot of friendly faces already since the minute I got back West."

"Confound you and your hold-backs and puzzle games, Chester Junior," fussed Keith. "You got another Home Guard bunch operating out on the flank in yon Coteau tangle of ravines?"

"Take a longer look, Keith," Bart advised jocularly. "They're in sight at last."

CHAPTER 35

Texican Towers Turns Up in Time

THE final wisp of mist eddied away while Keith took a long look. Out of the scrub fringing the nearest Coteau ravine, along the foot of the Cactus Hills, down past the United States Cavalry camp on the border itself, he saw half a dozen familiar figures ride out toward him, all blowing the powder residue and curling smoke from their weapons and holstering them with rangemen's deftness.

Coughing down his gulp of astonishment, he recognized Florida Fred Waite, slim, sunburned, the Creole ornaments shaking on his hat band; Jim From Georgia Orde with his gloved hands and bandana-decorated hat-brim; Mississippi Mat Salter with features like Old Man River; Alabama Andy Cull, moon-faced, mellow-eyed, dark-visaged man of watermelon lands and corn fields; Louisiana (Lou-Lou) Hackett, colossal-framed, baggy and Bulky in Searchlight overalls; Texican Towers invested in his foreman's authority, his long nose and bucket-head held high, his hands still recounting certain incidents of the recent encounter in a flirt and wave of Sioux sign-talk.

"My great guiding stars!" exclaimed Keith. "Who else from Kansas?"

"Nobody else," assured Florida Fred. "Easy to count. Only us six."

"The rest have just gone back," enlarged Jim From Georgia, nodding vaguely southward.

"And some won't go back at all—Sioux," revealed

Mississippi Mat Salter.

"White Deer for one," Alabama Andy named the Indian killed in the Coteau du Missouri gun fight.

"Gray Goose for another," put in Louisiana, continuing the tally of the dead. "No Meat, too. All their good scouts and trackers."

"Including Wild Elk, head man, Flame Eye's brother," disclosed Texican Towers, capping the count. "We're sure sorry to confess ourselves, Keith, about riding off the R C A Range without orders, but Game-Leg Godfrey and Old Bill Leathermouth are still down there holding forth in all three sections."

"That's good news," encouraged Keith, as Texican paused modestly in his report.

Texican hesitated, evidently fearing his account was getting pretty close to boasting concerning his own prowess and the dexterity of the R C A boys.

"Go on, Texican," Keith urged him. "I said to Constable Bart Chester there was a bunch of hammer-fanners in yon Coteau. Only Bart had me fooled till you showed up like ghost riders from our home corrals."

"Well," Texican blurted, "you know I speak the Sioux lingo, Keith, and when Flame Eye chased your track I heard him send his rider Shoot So Far to White Cap for them to double drygulch you on the border line of the Coteau. So, shucks! my boys just had to trail Wild Elk and take a hand, account of Ruby Fleury and Ilo Ross here. They sure swear by those girls, and back them with their guns."

Texican flourished toward the cover of scrubby

bushes running over the Coteau.

"A few Sioux wounded in yonder," he resumed. "Didn't get toted away by their chums; but mebber Rider Imp can bring them out in his wagon."

"On the jump, Texican," agreed Rider Imp. "I'm off after them this minute."

Rider Imp wheeled his covered vehicle, preparing to pick up the abandoned wounded.

"Couple of the R C A boys got nicked slightly," Texican confessed, "so mebber Ruby can put some sticking plaster on them."

Professionally Nurse Fleury reached for her first-aid bag on the circling wagon.

"Certainly, Texican, I'll gum them up right smart," she promised gaily.

"We must be your first patients on the Canada Trail, Ruby," chuckled Texican.

"Yes, and you're darn welcome, Texican, turning up in time," Ruby thanked him warmly. "If I need help with the patients, I've always a spare uniform that I do can wear. What about it, Ilo, honey child?"

"You bet, Texican," smiled Ilo. "I can't make such an awful bad assistant. It sure seems the double dry-gulch is on the other stream, for Constable Bart Chester has just scouted a company of Canadian soldiers — Lieutenant Merritt's Governor General's Bodyguards—onto White Cap himself."

Texican nodded admiringly toward the Mounted man and to the Horse Guards' commander.

"Plumb tickled to see you bringing Shoot So Far in, Constable," he congratulated. "So that's White Cap

you're toting along, Lieutenant. His handsome face is new to me."

"We're sure obliged to you, Texican," Bart assured the R C A foreman. "I counted on your help when Larry Walters yonder brought the word that you and your hands were trailing the Sioux."

"Certainly we weren't disappointed, eh?" smiled the Lieutenant. "You've a strong hand in both these captures of Shoot So Far and White Cap, Texican."

"Larry Walters!" whooped Texican. "You old mangy key puncher, I might have known somebody would light a signal fire on the home range for you as soon as trouble started shooting."

"You moth-eaten, skin-blistered old cowpuncher!" Larry sent back gleefully. "Don't you go calling me crazy, mechanical names, Texican. Thunderation, but your meandering nose is a happy sight."

"Yessirree, Texican, you're welcome as wisteria from home, orders or no orders," trumpeted Ted Ross. "Ask Keith if you're not."

"Homelike as my own hearthstone, Texican," grinned Keith. "And right in line for more trouble. Constable Bart has another route all mapped out for you."

"Sure," announced Bart. "For Captain Jack Stewart is enrolling at Calgary a bunch of Rocky Mountain Rangers to ride border patrol and fan out as far as Medicine Hat. They must be good riders, straight shooters—American cowboys included. They'll ride to keep watch on the boundary and Blood and Peigan Reserves, while more Rangers are needed to patrol

our Humboldt Trail and to keep up communications there. R C A horsemen really fill that gap, and you'll be sworn in right pronto. Steele's scouts and Stewart's Rocky Mountain Rangers are bands you'll be proud of, boys, also Major Hatton's Alberta Mounted Rifles."

Texican grinned and sign-talked his immediate acceptance of the roving commission.

Florida Fred, Jim From Georgia, Mississippi Mat, Alabama Andy and Louisiana Lou waved their sombreros with yippees that rang out like a cheer.

"How come you were standing in the boundary front door when we trailed in, Constable?" asked Texicana with growing curiosity.

"I was in Toronto, delivering those very horses the Bodyguards are riding, when the call-out of the troops came and Larry Walters blew in via Chicago and told me Wild Elk was on the stalk."

Keith Culver pointed a reproachful finger at the laughing Constable.

"You never mentioned it to me, Bart," he accused his friend.

"I was just going to mention it when Texican's gun talk interrupted," Bart apologized. "Everything's turned out all right, you see. Now we'll get back to our Double C Ranch and celebrate fittingly."

Chester Senior was just as eager as his son to lope for the home range.

"Yes, you're all heading for a suitable jamboree," Mortimer enthused. "The Double-C having a bachelor ranch house, all we lack there are some ladies to

do the honors, while everybody has a good time."

"That's all arranged now," Bart vowed, his eyes on Ilo again while they rode away. "Ilo, Ruby and Lily will do the honors and receive our distinguished guests at the door."

He waved Texican and the R C A hands into line with the Moffatt and the Double C men.

"So roll along with the gang, Texican," he exulted. "The Double C riders will sure show you where to hang up your saddles."

CHAPTER 36

The Welcome of the West

A GAY ranch, the Double C celebrated, now that the Home Guard could relax a little from the strain of night and day patrol and the menace of the Sioux had been lifted with the defeat and death of Wild Elk and his leading braves and the capture of Shoot So Far and White Cap.

It was an event to celebrate in the Western way, while they all outfitted afresh, reshod their horses and swiftly made all necessary preparations for the trek on West again to Humboldt.

Everybody in the country poured in at the invitation, for Chester Senior and Bart seemed to know everybody, and in addition they had the super attraction of ladies in their ranch house.

Three beautiful ladies acted as reception committee and hostesses at the Chester doorway, Lily Levis announcing the arrivals and passing them on to Ruby Fleury and Ilo Ross.

"Lieutenant-Governor and Mrs. Edgar Dewdney," Lily presented them, giving proper precedence to the Northwest's first gentleman and first lady of the Territories, "honoring the Chester Double C ranch house."

"My dear Lily," cried Mrs. Dewdney, shaking hands, "you look charming after your holiday in your Quebec homeland."

"Wonderful, Lily, wonderful—glad to see you're back," declared the Honorable Edgar. "Our friends

the Forgets said you were somewhere on the road. *Monsieur Forget* and *Madame* are right behind us. But, by Jove, who are your astounding friends?"

"Kansas City girls, Ruby Fleury and Ilo Ross," Lily explained, "up from the Missouri with Ilo's father, Ted Ross—over yonder, see—and her cousin Keith Culver and other fresh R C A scouts for the Mounted Police. They fell in with Captain Paul Hull's caravan and traveled along with us and the United States Cavalry, too—represented by Major Wade and Colonel Butt whom you'll meet there in the crowd ahead of you. That was lucky, on account of the Sioux, and Texican Towers' R C A riders double-lucked us."

"Oh! yes—yes, of course," nodded Dewdney. "How do, Major Wade, Colonel Butt. That was grand delivery on the extra Gatling guns. How do, Culver; how do, Ross. All your bunch, including Texican and Rider Imp—how do, boys. Constable Bart Chester has got you sworn in at headquarters already, so I hear."

The Honorable Edgar was talking easily to the men but, used as he was to congratulating aristocratic women whom he met, he stumbled for words at the charm and freshness of Ruby and Ilo, so that *Madame* and *Monsieur Forget* broke in with new hand shakings and merry greetings.

"*Monsieur and Madame Forget!*" was Lily's official announcement of their arrival.

"Lily, dear!" exclaimed *Madame*, kissing her. "I got your last letter, and I was fearfully afraid for you. My Heavens, the whole country of the Northwest is

in such a state of alarm."

"Your Kansas friends," cried *Monsieur* Forget, giving them all the hand of camaraderie, joking with them all, "are so lovely, so fine, such big people. Let me ask them about Scout Bob Armstrong."

Monsieur Forget started to recount his meeting with Bob when he and Madame were moving from Battleford to the new Regina seat of government.

End-of-steel, Moose Jaw, dugout, pies, solitary bunk and many other apparently laughter-evoking terms were mingled in the uproarious account.

"The Northwest Mounted, from Regina headquarters!" the voice of Lily Levis interjected through their noisy babel and mirth.

The flash of scarlet uniforms from the Barracks blazed in, from Commanding Officer down to N. C. O. and raw recruit.

"The Press—a long list," Lily introduced, reading names and faces with a celerity nothing short of magical as she ushered them in one by one.

Those industrious and illustrious journalists Mr. George Ham, Mr. Nicholas Flood Davin, Mr. Kennedy, Mr. Bridall, Mr. Moore, Mr. Macdonald, Mr. Atkins, Mr. Jeff and other news-hounds went nosing like beagles here, there and everywhere through the crowds.

"The Militia!" Lily called next, her words thrilling with a proud ring.

Everybody understood that it was impossible to introduce them all in person. Some were still answering the call-out in points back East. Others were en-

training for the West or struggling over the North Shore rail gaps along Lake Superior. More were in the actual process of arriving at the Qu'Appelle base camp. A few had passed on already to the mid-West for the advance from the Calgary end. Mounted Police Superintendents and ex-militia officers of the far outlying or blockaded forts and posts were patently absent from the remarkable gathering.

Yet in spirit they were all there, in Mortimer Chester's spacious ranch house, including many who had come in person, gazetted to such-and-such a rank, or were travelling swiftly on their way. All were represented either actually in the flesh or by their acknowledgment of the hospitable invitation. Many wired telegrams. Several forwarded messages by courier or by train mail. A number sent proxies or dropped a card. Altogether the assembly's response was enthusiastic, congratulatory, and the universal enthusiasm augured well for the success of the imminent campaign, with only the faint echo of regret from the unavoidably absent.

"Lieutenant-Colonel Lord Melgund, secretary to the Governor General of Canada!"

Applause shook the decorated rafters of the Double C ranch house.

"Captain Todd, of the Governor General's Foot Guards from Ottawa."

Hand clapping greeted mention of this unit, for news of the G. G. Horse Guards' exploit reflected much glory on their comrades of the infantry.

"Lieutenant-Colonel Oswald, Montreal."

His was a telegram of best wishes wired en route, regretting his enforced absence.

"Lieutenant-Colonel Scott."

Scott was another reluctant absentee.

Then Lily Levis' guest list waved in her hand with a special flourish.

"Major-General Frederick D. Middleton, G. O. C.," she smiled triumphantly.

They cheered, tiger and all, and his A. D. C.'s got the tail end of it.

"Captain Wise, A. D. C."

The Captain did not seem to mind the ovation in which he complacently shared.

"Captain Doucet, A. D. C."

Doucet was equally affable, as a fellow attendant on the G. O. C. should be.

"Lieutenant-Colonel Tyrwhitt!"

A *saue* message preceded him.

"Colonel Walker Powell!"

Likewise his card of representation would have to do for the night.

"Lieutenant-Colonel Grassett!"

The acclaim for the commander of the Royal Grenadiers told that the "Grens" had many friends of long standing in that shining company.

"Lieutenant-Colonel Otter!"

Reception of the Queen's Own officer's name showed the Q. O. R. not a bit behind the "Grens" in the estimation of the closely packed group of men, women and children.

"Lieutenant-Colonel Montizambert!"

The artillery commander, who had proven himself a gun wizard across the Dog Lake and other steel breaks on the Algoma section, hardly needed any sponsoring, for his fame had gone before him.

"Lieutenant-Colonel Quimet!"

His letter was his passport to popularity, duty detaining him at that joyful moment.

"Lieutenant-Colonel Deacon!"

Another fine soldier, friend of Westerners rich and poor, old and young alike, held up by transport, so that his calling card came late. Deacon ranked with the best of those present.

"Captain Gat Howard!"

The Chester home rocked with explosive yells, for "Gat" was the man who banked on Gatling guns, and his universal prestige brought the United States Cavalry officers into the charmed circle of admiration also, the incisive Major Wade relaxing till his smile wiped out his cheek's saber cut, the benignant Colonel Butt positively exuding Southern courtesy, kind, soft as the touch of cotton plumes or the mist of the bayou's breath in Mississippi's darkness.

"Lieutenant-Colonel Williams!"

He had a proxy to take the honors, in fact several proxies who could answer for him and others who were on urgent missions.

"Major McKeand!"

The Major's summons came along with one or two more missing who were on the train, at the base or selecting the pick of the home units before they set out.

"Major Jarvis!"

Jarvis carried his magic name even here, a name to conjure with. He was a horseman, yachtsman, gentleman, campaigner, the idol of the hunt for the eager Toronto press correspondents.

"Lieutenant-Colonel Van Straubenzie!"

Van was copy for them, too, for they had followed him for interviews in other fields, industrial, financial, social, as well as on the military parade ground.

"Lieutenant-Colonel Denison!"

Commander of the Governor General's Bodyguards, whose cavalry ability had been evidenced in the scouting coup of Lieutenant Bill Merritt's company, it was no accident that Denison was immediately the center of intense interest and conversation.

"Lieutenant-Colonel Miller, Q. O. R.," Lily Levis came to the end of her uniformed-guest list.

In command of the Queen's Own but modestly so, Miller quietly turned the shower of good will onto his men in the ranks, while Lily was counting up.


"Colonel Miller is the last officer on our list," Lily checked off. "A couple of dozen officers are here or accounted for, and half a dozen more have gone farther West, Alberta way. I should like to be able to announce Lieutenant-Colonel Irvine, Lieutenant-Colonel Boulton, Major Hatton, Major-General Strange, Superintendent Crozier, Major Sam Steele, and others, but you know exactly where they are. So welcome, Officers and Gentlemen from the East—the welcome of the West to you, your rank and file."

Again came clapping, cheering, ejaculations of approval at those significant names.

Lily Levis smiled as she went on with her final welcome of the evening.

"Illustrators! Artists for the Press!" she concluded.

"Mr. Adams, Mr. Innes, among several others who—who really do not seem to be here for the opening ceremonies yet. Oh! yes, here's another, young, but probably the most important adept with the drawing pencil—Bugler Jack Beatty, of the Queen's Own Rifles."



CHAPTER 37

The Golden Girl

WITH Bugler Beatty entered another soldier in the Queen's Own Rifles uniform, his friend and companion of the trying North Shore marches, his bunk mate of the colonist coaches, the flat cars and the construction camps along that forever to be remembered Superior Trail—Private G. H. Needler, belonging to the K or University Company.

"Corporal Needler, they're going to make him," Beatty grinned. "So in he goes, proud as any commissioned officer here."

"In the West we do as the Westerners do," Needler laughed, saluting easily. "Our Q. O. R. drummer is here, too, to make things lively."

"And you can talk your Latin to your heart's content, G. H.," Beatty teased him. "Here's a whole bunch of correspondents howling on the track of news for their various papers."

"Yes, and they'll give you much scope in your own art, Jack," prophesied Needler merrily. "I know they're just dying for sketches of us packed into gravel cars, Camp Magpie, Camp Desolation, our comrades the Royal Grenadiers riding across the icy bays, Colonel Otter's column on wilderness trek, and all those interesting things. Go right to work, my boy, with your wonderful drawing. It's such an opportunity tonight as maybe you won't find again on a thousand miles of trail ahead."

Indeed, youthful Jack Beatty was in his element.

in these animated surroundings. His pencil and sketch book came out the minute he was inside the room, catching the line and atmosphere of the colorful ranch house gathering as the supper, song and dance began in vigorous rotation.

The girl hostesses caught the young Bugler's artistic eye and, although his remarkable penchant was scene rather than human figure drawing, he was quick to record their unusual symmetry and grace, the allure of their hair, eyes and strikingly beautiful features glowing above their softly hued evening costumes of silk and satin.

"There's your best material," the prospective Corporal Needler spurred him on. "You won't see such a fine-looking trio of girls again between the Laurentians and the Rocky Mountains."

"That's a heap of flattery," laughed Ruby.

Beatty knew it better than the coming professor of languages could.

"Hold that instrument pose, please—please," he begged of Lily, in all her glory at the piano, rippling out the magical music of old Quebec and the Paris boulevards where she had studied.

He ran in his deft lines with all possible haste, but with an inherent delicacy of touch that lifted the results far above the mere rough record of a sketch.

"Wonderful," Lily cried. "You've caught the rhythm, all right."

He beseeched Ruby, too, all the time he worked on Lily's face and figure and her instrument, while the rapt crowd listened appreciatively.

"Do stand that way a little longer," he begged the girl the Indians called White Woman Doctor and Singing Nurse. "Your singing attitude is something I won't find in a month of Sundays."

Ruby Fleury was singing beside Lily, then, to the latter's accompaniment, singing the plantation songs of the South; and, capturing her charm rapidly, he flipped a page to pass on to Ilo who, more even than the other two, seemed the very incarnation of the Northwest girl.

Up-and-coming Corporal Needler egged him forward at a whirlwind pace.

"What live Western luck to strike, Jack!" Needler breathed, staring over his shoulder. "Keep scratching. Don't let anything escape you."

"Amazing," exulted Beatty. "I've never seen such expression. I've never had such a model before. There's only one name for that."

He scribbled the title under the sketch as he finished it flourishingly.

"What's that?" his companion asked. "What are you calling it, Jack?"

"Read it," Bugler Beatty snickered. "Where are your spectacles, Professor?"

"*'The Golden Girl,'*" Needler read.

"Goodness!" exclaimed Ilo. "It certainly transforms the original."

Beatty reveled, also, in the massed spectacle of both the Mounted and the Militia. The newspaper correspondents quickly discovered valuable material in his models and groups; stirring fresh copy to send



on to their respective journals, following hard after their first accounts concerning the bitter North Shore trip along Lake Superior and their descriptions of the lively, tent-dotted Qu'Appelle Base camp. These descriptions had covered the ground pretty diligently thus far. The accounts set forth General Middleton's three-way plan of a lightning campaign to choke off the rebellion at its source, Batoche, before it could swell into a widespread insurrection. Each report was spiced by thrilling stories about Scout Robert Armstrong in his mysterious, blockaded Prince Albert stronghold somewhere; tall tales of his famous partner scouts Ted Ross and Keith Culver, and of Keith's feud with the Sioux; Texican Towers' R C A riders' border battle; the Bodyguards' capture of White Cap and Constable Bart Chester's dashing part in the exploit by his arrest of Shoot So Far. Added to this were stories on the possibilities of romance coloring everything, inspired by the arrival of this trio of girls, Lily, Ruby, Ilo, who had answered so fatefully when called Northwest.

The rapid-fire artist-reporter discussion propounded many a riddle, but the one that appeared to bother them most was the question as to which was the more effective Western force, the Mounted Police or the soldier regulars of the Canadian Militia.

"Yes, perhaps someone can tell us that," suggested Davin, of *The Regina Leader*, seeing a chance to work in the brilliant satire for which he was noted and with which he consistently overshadowed most of his fellow press men.

Big George Ham, of *The Winnipeg Free Press*, a wizard himself with words, possessing a rich vein of humor and a flair for verse with an Ojibway Forest background, who had coveted entry to the best magazines, nodded in agreement with Davin's suggestion.

"That's a good lead, Nick," Ham observed judiciously. "I for one should like to see that point settled once and for all to the great benefit of the newspapers."

Moore, a correspondent for the Eastern journals, laughed slyly at them both.

"Is the current criticism getting through your notoriously thick hide, George?" he inquired. "Don't get heated up over military rivalry."

"No, George, you have the reputation of a fat man and a genial jokester, a good press agent for the whole Northwest, including the Canadian Pacific Railway," Kennedy, another Easterner, sided with his team-mate, Moore to tease Ham. "You mustn't boil over like that. Take off your huge fur cap and you'll cool down a bit."

Big George Ham slapped the offending, wedge-shaped cap on the bench they were using for a press table on account of the shifting crowd in the room.

"And if you'd take the dent out of your derby, Kennedy, you wouldn't look so much like a London Cockney strayed from home out on the Western prairie," he turned the laugh right back on his tormentor.

Kennedy took off his derby with sudden stiff gravity, inspected it slowly, pushed out the crown with

skillful finger tips and laid it conspicuously beside *The Winnipeg Free Press* correspondent's furry headgear.

"It was the crush in the sleigh, George, and coming through the doorway yonder," he excused his personal appearance.

All the correspondents drew into closer, hilarious conclave, Macdonald, Atkins and Jeff enjoying it especially because they were neutral and could therefore lampoon both sides with impunity. Since he handled their telegraphic reports, Larry Walters, too, was intrigued as he joined them.

"I'll wire your decision, free of charge," Larry told them, chuckling, "as soon as you arrive at an unanimous one."

"Then you'll be cheated, Larry," warned Macdonald, "whatever conclusion emanates from this high command of Northwest strategy."

"You aren't Scotch, are you, Larry?" Atkins tittered, smacking the broad back of the Kansas City operator.

"No, not so parsimonious," boasted Larry. "I'm Yankee born and bred."

The Ottawa journalist Jeff took him up instantly at the revelation of his alien nationality.

"Then a son of Jonathan ought to be shrewd enough to solve this difficulty," Jeff guffawed. "You'd better appoint a judge of experience to settle the case. Eh, Larry? Choose one, quick."

Larry Walters looked around swiftly, instinctively, his merry topaz eyes ranging about the room.

"Constable Bart Chester can answer that one if any Mounted man can," Larry decided without hesitation or apparent consideration.

The Toronto pen wielder Bridall thumped the bench as if it were really the most important furniture in a judge's court.

"Order!" Bridall called. "Silence!—while Constable Bart Chester speaks up and clinches this argument to the satisfaction of the reading public."

He beckoned Bucking Bart from Ilo Ross' side.

CHAPTER 38

Battle Honors

"WE KNOW now what the Militia are doing," Bridall put the issue directly. "We want to know what the Mounted Police are doing."

Constable Bart Chester answered with amazing promptness and astounding vigor.

"I'll tell you correspondents," he explained loyally. "The Mounted Police grip the disturbed country in an iron ring. Rocky Mountainward, Superintendent Cotton holds the Macleod District, and he's sending Inspector Perry with a second column and a gun to help General Strange's first column from Calgary that is going to the relief of Edmonton with Major Sam Steele's scouts and Major Hatton's Alberta Mounted Rifles."

Bart paused to let that sink into the consciousness of the various writers.

They all were scribbling assiduously in an abruptly startled way upon the handy bench.

Big George Ham flourished his pen the fastest, surreptitiously spattering ink upon his rivals' copy.

"Just so—of course, just so," Ham gloated over his busy rivals after the first recording of the requested campaign evidence. "Go on, Bart. Give it to them, hot and heavy."

"Superintendent Mellwree holds the Maple Creek N. W. M. P. post," Bart continued.

"Yes, that accounts for a couple of big slices of territory," nodded Davin. "Keep going right along,

Bart—there's lots of room."

"Inspector Dickens holds Fort Pitt," Bart went on, swinging away to the north.

"What about Fort Saskatchewan up there?" Moore ventured to ask.

"Sergeant Griesbach holds Fort Saskatchewan," the Constable told them pointedly.

"Then there's Battleford, too, we hear so much of," Macdonald prompted him. "I suppose it's just as well looked after, eh?"

"Inspector Morris holds Battleford," Bart informed him, with emphasis, "holds it strongly, as is necessary in old Poundmaker's country."

Bart paused, and by the length of the pause they knew his final blast was coming, his last and bull's-eye shot at them.

"Last but not least," he spoke caustically, "Superintendent Crozier holds Prince Albert—the king pin of the campaign wagon. If Prince Albert goes, everything goes. Don't you writing boys start the public wondering what the Mounted Police are doing picnicking in Prince Albert. Don't you start the people asking why about two hundred-odd men are shut up there, why they don't dash across country and fall on Louis Riel's feeble force of one thousand, five hundred Batoche men armed to their bearded teeth. No such nonsense as that!"

Yet in spite of Bart's spirited defense of the Force of which he was a member, he knew that poisonous lies were being spread by rebel adherents about the inactivity, about the non-cooperation of the Mounted,

about jealousy between the Redcoats and the Militia.

With the printing of the correspondents' reports, he knew that the newspapers arriving in the base camp during the succeeding days would confirm his suspicions. For the newspapers would carry those very same senseless questions slipped into their headlines.

What were the Mounted Police doing?

The true reply was—everything.

The Mounted Police were scouting every military move, riding every patrol, doing fort duty in every threatened post, marching mad miles without count wherever trouble broke with the rebels.

Monsieur Forget, listening amusedly close by, poured some advisory oil on the verbal whirlpools.

"About the only cuss from Kansas missing from this controversial celebration is Bob Armstrong," *Monsieur* put in with soothing diplomacy. "I guess Bob is also the only man who will be able to give a satisfying answer, once he gets through Riel's blockade. By the time you newspaper gentlemen manage to work up to the fighting front, as far, say, as Clark's Crossing, on the Saskatchewan River, you'll no doubt obtain the real facts, indisputable information."

Big George Ham brightened considerably, bobbing his ponderous head triumphantly to each and every one of his companions in a telepathic calculation.

"If Scout Robert Armstrong brings us despatches to Clark's Crossing, we'll bonus him handsomely," *The Winnipeg Free Press* man declared.

Monsieur Forget chuckled confidently.

"Your fellow correspondents had better prepare to contribute their share of the bonus, George," Forget smiled. "You'll pay, all right."

"We won't grudge it any if only we have the chance to pay," Ham boasted.

Monsieur Forget leaned forward, a knowing twinkle ridging the corners of his humorous eyes.

"It's a foregone conclusion that another Mounted Police reinforcement will have to be sent to Prince Albert," he confided. "The Honorable Edgar, the Regina Barracks C. O. and I are waiting anxiously for Bob's word to see how many men they'll need. Oh! yes, my press friends, you'll get your opportunity to part with your money."

"How are you so sure Scout Robert Armstrong will sneak through, Forget?" doubted Davin. "How do you Regina strategists know that your own word ever penetrated to Prince Albert?"

"In case it didn't, General Middleton is sending two couriers, Mr. Bedson and Mr. McDowall, in there with news about the Militia's own progress toward Batoche. So we'll soon have a reply. Certainly, gentlemen, you may leave your purse strings loose to pay that bonus."

Constable Bart Chester had recovered his good humor almost instantly after his stern address to the erring circle of news writers.

He wanted to hurry back to Ilo's side, so he laughed delightedly as Monsieur took up the cudgel, and let him argue it successfully.

As Bart turned away, Bugler Beatty came by, with Corporal Needler and the Q. O. R. drummer, handing the correspondents some of his graphic sketches to accompany their articles.

The Q. O. R. drummer was at Beatty's elbow, next to the press bench, with the regiment's drum.

Beatty reached past Bart and took his pencil to the drum.

"Watch him at work now, Bart," Needler beamed.

"What's that for, ~~jack~~?" asked Bart curiously as he paused a moment. "What are you aiming to try out now?"

"Battle honors," murmured the Bugler, a sort of reverence in his voice. "You know where the battle honors rest, don't you?"

Bart Chester nodded understandingly.

Since a rifle regiment carried no flags, whatever distinction lay ahead of them in the impending fighting would be recorded in battle honors on the drum head of the Q. O. R. drum.

"Sure, that's the spot," Bart observed sympathetically. "What's it going to be?"

Beatty sketched on the taut skin the simple words: NORTHWEST REBELLION, 1885.

He smiled happily at Bart.

"When we've smelled smoke, I'll paint it in," he vowed. "First battle honors since the Fenian Raid of 1866."

The dancing was commencing all about them.

Bart hurried back to claim the partner he had left temporarily.

Bugler Beatty followed his movements with shrewd young eyes and showed the newspaper men his drawing of the Golden Girl.

Back with Ilo, leading the dance while the violins played by Ted Ross, Rider Imp Burt and Texican Towers gaily shrilled away, Bart's good spirits rose to new heights, as Ilo, the Golden Girl, flashed like a sunbeam in his arms among the crowd.

Participants in and spectators of the terpsichorean merriment apparently agreed with the youthful artist's opinion of the Golden Girl.

"Pick the three loveliest girls in the dance," *Madame* Forget tested Mrs. Dewdney gaily.

"Ilo Ross, Ruby Fleury and Lily Levis," chose *Madame* laughingly. "Now you select the three handsomest men."

"Constable Bart Chester, with Ilo; Captain Paul Hull, with Ruby; Keith Culver, with Lily," decided the Lieutenant-Governor's wife.

Monsieur Forget had won his controversy with the press and had returned dutifully to the ladies accompanied by the Honorable Edgar.

"Evidently Chester, Hull and Culver are wholehearted, too, about their partners," commented *Monsieur*, admiring them all mischievously.

"I don't blame them," chuckled Dewdney. "That's the way they've been dancing all evening. That's the way it will always be for them in this Northwest campaign."

Ilo, dancing by with Bart, overheard the Lieutenant-Governor's prediction above the music of her

father's, Rider Imp's and Texican's fiddles.

"Saying nasty things about us, Bart," she smiled as they swayed in the rapture of the waltz:

"Lovely things, Ilo," Bart corrected. "Don't you think so yourself?"

"Well—" she hesitated.

"Honest now."

"Well—kind of nice, Bart."

